TRUST AND DOMINION

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AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON MARK

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POINT FIVE PRESS
Dallas, Georgia

Trust and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Mark

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Published by
Point Five Press
P.O. Box 2778
Dallas, Georgia 30132

Typesetting by Kyle Shepherd

This book is dedicated to

Scott and Angela North

who have a relationship
based on trust

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INTRODUCTION

The Gospel of Mark is shorter than the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, or John. With respect to the subject of economics, 10 of the 20 passages in Mark are found in Matthew's Gospel. Two are found in Luke. In most cases, these other two Gospels provide additional information to Mark's accounts.

The primary economic theme in Matthew's Gospel is setting priorities. First, people must choose between Christ and mammon. "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24).[1] Second, they must arrange their hierarchy of priorities in terms of this more fundamental decision. In English, there is a verb that describes this process: to prioritize.

Mark's Gospel is dedicated to the theme of trust. In choosing between God and mammon, which is not mentioned by name in Mark, people must exercise trust. They must decide between two pathways to eternity. They must trust their judgment. They are responsible agents. What they decide has eternal consequences. Both Matthew and Mark quote Jesus on this fundamental choice.

> For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Matt. 16:26)[2]

> For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? (Mark 8:36)[3]

This mandates the choice between one of two covenants. Both covenants offer positive sanctions. Mammon's offers worldly possessions

1. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 14.
2. *Ibid*., ch. 35.
3. Chapter 11.

and attainments. God offers eternal life. Mammon's does not offer this.

The question then arises: Does God's covenant also offer worldly possessions and attainments? Is His covenant either/or or both/and? Is it as one-sided as mammon's? Christianity has yet to come to a theologically developed answer to this, but the vast majority of Christians since the mid-eighteenth century have concluded "both/and." Theologians have followed the lead of laymen, but they have not presented systematic, Bible-based reasons for this. I have. I draw on the five books of Moses to defend my position, most notably Moses' words in Deuteronomy 8. "But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (v. 18).[4]

Those theologians who adopt a "New Testament only" doctrine of God's New Covenant are hampered by the fact that Jesus said very little about economics. Neither did He say much about politics. He did not have to. He preached to Israelites who had the law and the prophets. He did not come before the Israelites with a theology of the blank slate. He came in the name of the Mosaic inheritance.

> Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:17–20).[5]

> Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets (Matt. 7:12).[6]

Paul preached to both Jews and gentiles, warning the Jews not to block the entrance of the gentiles into the inheritance that was promised by the law and the prophets. He also told the gentiles about the promised inheritance.

> Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery,

4. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 22.

5. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethic*s, 3rd ed. (Nacogdoches, Texas: Covenant Media Press, [1977] 2002).

6. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 16.

> which was kept secret since the world began, But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith (Rom. 16:25–26).
>
> Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit (Eph. 2:19–22).

Mark's Gospel does not call men to trust in a covenant without judicial content or without sanctions in history. It calls men to trust in a comprehensive covenant that serves as the basis of establishing the kingdom of God in history. Because the kingdom of God is in history, it relies on a system of laws and sanctions. Christ's kingdom manifests itself in history. It is as much a kingdom as Satan's. Satan's makes earthly promises and requires earthly sacrifice. So does Christ's. Satan's kingdom makes claims regarding the whole world. So does Christ's.

> Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve (Matt. 4:8–10).[7]

Conclusion

Every person must decide which kingdom will be the focus of his efforts in history. There is no escape from this choice.

Jesus warned: "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad" (Matt. 12:30). To decide which kingdom to serve, each person must exercise trust. This is a continuing theme in Mark's Gospel.

Trust is an important issue for economic theory and practice. A society with low levels of trust suffers from high costs of cooperation. A high-trust society has lower transaction costs. The difference in economic growth rates is statistically verifiable.[8]

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7. *Ibid.*, ch. 3.

8. Frances Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

Christianity teaches that men can trust God. They can also trust the covenantal cause-and-effect judicial system that God has established for society. If this system were not predictable, men would be blind in their assessments of the costs and benefits of trusting each other.

1

TRUST AND COSTS

Now as he walked by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men. And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him. And when he had gone a little farther thence, he saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the ship mending their nets. And straightway he called them: and they left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants, and went after him.

MARK 1:16–20

A. Heeding God's Call

The theocentric principle here was obedience to God's call: hierarchy, point two of the biblical covenant.[1] Jesus called to four fishermen. He used the metaphor of fishing to describe their new lives. He asked them to leave their occupations and become fishers of men. He literally called to them. This is why we describe a person's career as a calling. A calling may be more than an occupation. A calling defines a person. It is his unique service to God or men.

Two sets of brothers immediately left their occupations. They did not sell their share of the businesses. They left their capital behind. They made no preparation for the sale of their property. In the case of James and John, the brothers had considerable equity. They had nets, they had a ship, and they had hired servants. Their father stayed behind. Their father was in a position to manage the capital. Nev-

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economic, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1982] 2010), ch. 2.

ertheless, he had relied on them as part of the family business, and they left him without warning. They placed at risk the value of the capital which the family business had accumulated. This intangible capital included their prior commitment to remain in the business with whatever skills they possessed. It called into question the future of the family enterprise.

As we will see in a subsequent passage, Jesus did this with Levi. "And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him" (Mark 2:14).[2] Levi was a tax collector. Jesus called him, and he left immediately. He even left behind the money that he had collected. "And he left all, rose up, and followed him" (Luke 5:28).

B. A Cost-Benefit Analysis

When Jesus called them, He did not give them any time to make a decision. They did not demand time to make a decision. They immediately decided that they would leave their occupations for a new calling. Jesus did not tell them what, exactly, this calling would be. They had to make their decision based on their trust in His offer, His good judgment in exercising His authority, and the willingness of others either to support the ministry by donations or to hire them part-time after they became disciples.

They had no time to make a careful cost-benefit analysis. They had spent their lives in a profit-seeking occupation. There was a market for the output of their labor. They caught fish, and they sold fish. It was an ancient occupation, and they did it well enough to remain competitive producers. They were exchanging the predictability of an established profit-seeking business for the unpredictability of a non-profit ministry. They would not subsequently sell their services directly to buyers. They would not advertise their services. There would be far less predictability associated with a ministry than there had been with fishing. There was nothing to compare the two careers.

Jesus did not spend any time explaining what He wanted them to do. He said that they would be fishers of men, which presumably meant that they would bring Jesus' message to other people. These people would be brought into the circle of listeners and supporters of Jesus. The disciples would walk with Jesus for three years, be instructed by Jesus, yet learn almost nothing about His ministry. Again

2. Chapter 3.

and again, they failed to understand what He was saying and teaching. They remained at His side, but they learned very little. Most important, they did not return to their previous occupations.

Jesus gave them an opportunity to serve God in a special way. They became His disciples. Their degree of commitment to Him personally had been manifested by the fact that they had asked no questions when He made the call to them. They did not hesitate. They did not count the costs in any systematic fashion. They committed their lives to Him, even though it cost them whatever capital they had possessed as fishermen. They walked away from their accumulated capital into a new career which was completely unknown to them. In other words, they exercised great faith.

Jesus wanted men of great faith, for such men would become the founders of the Christian church. Men of great faith respond rapidly to a call from God to commit to Him their lives and whatever resources they possess. This is what the disciples did with Jesus.

Jesus called them, and they responded. By normal standards, this was a high-risk decision on their part. It relied on enormous trust. But this is what faith is all about. Men commit in a major way to someone who possesses a unique ministry. In this case, they committed to a man, based only on His calling to them. He trusted them, and they trusted Him. The Gospel of John indicates that Peter and Andrew had already spoken with Jesus (John 1:35–42). There is no textual evidence that He had spoken with James and John.

This incident indicates that Jesus' call contained elements of the supernatural. He knew how they would respond. He knew that they would stick with Him for a long period of ministerial training. He had confidence that they would serve as the organizational foundation of the Christian church. He had supernatural knowledge of their capacities.[3] They had almost no knowledge of His capacities. It was a one-sided transaction. Nevertheless, they accepted the terms of exchange. They gave up a steady income for the sake of spending time with Jesus, performing tasks He would assign to them.

This indicates that they had great confidence in the benefits of becoming disciples of Jesus. They counted the costs in a matter of seconds. They dismissed these costs as economically irrelevant. What

3. "Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee" (John 1:47–48).

were these costs? Whatever they would have earned as fisherman. This is the economic meaning of *cost*: the expected value of the most valuable alternative path that men necessarily surrender when they take a course of action. These men had skills as fishermen. They abandoned the occupation in which they had a competitive advantage. Whatever stream of income that they had counted on as fishermen, they dismissed as being of far less value than whatever income they would receive as disciples of Jesus. It was clear that this stream of income would be something other than money. Jesus had no money,[4] and He did not indicate that this was going to change anytime soon.

From the point of view of rational economic analysis, it is difficult to understand why the four brothers immediately abandoned their nets and followed Jesus. Jesus later recommended counting the cost of one's actions (Luke 14:28–30).[5] In this case, He gave the four fishermen little time to count the costs. He gave them no information of substance regarding what He would ask them to do as part of His ministry. Americans would call this a decision to buy a pig in a poke, but Jews in Jesus' day would not have used this phrase. This much is clear: the details of the transaction were not clear.

C. Turning Point

This was the most significant turning point in the lives of these four fishermen. They must have sensed that this was the case, because they abandoned everything that was familiar to them. They joined the ministry of a man who had no current disciples, who had just begun preaching. They would learn soon enough that He had been a carpenter, and He had abandoned His occupation, just as they had abandoned theirs. In none of the Gospels do we find out what their new source of income was. They always seemed to have a little money, but we are never told the source of this money. Despite the seeming uncertainty of remaining as disciples of Jesus, all of them stayed with Him until the end, even Judas.

This account of the calling of the first four disciples indicates the nature of the commitment which Jesus requires of those who would be His disciples. They are to respond positively to His offer to follow Him. He may call them to abandon all that is seemingly secure for

4. "And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Matt. 8:20).

5. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 35.

the sake of ministry. He may call them to walk away from their occupations: their sources of income. He may call them to exchange the familiar for the unfamiliar. In short, He may call them to do what very few people in any society have ever done or will ever do. He calls every disciple to a life of faith in which the only certainty that they possess is guaranteed access by prayer to the sovereign God of the universe. Nevertheless, most of His followers throughout history have not believed that God is absolutely sovereign. Augustinianism and Calvinism have been minority positions.

Jesus asked the four to discount sharply the value of their expected streams of income. Compared to His offer to join Him, whatever streams of income that they expected to receive were to be discounted sharply. Compared to the eternal stream of income that Jesus offers to His disciples, whatever the world offers is to be considered irrelevant. As He said later in his ministry, what profit is it that a man in the whole world and lose his soul (Mark 8:36)?[6] He was calling them to serve as disciples in terms of such a view of the future.

This indicates that Jesus believed that He was establishing a life-and-death ministry. This gives some indication of the value of the gospel. Jesus believed that His offer to exchange a relatively safe career for an uncertain career was a rational offer. It was a rational offer only because the stakes were so high. This was a life-and-death decision. It was more than that; it was an eternal life-and-death decision. All four of the brothers made the decision that Jesus asked them to make.

This was the meaning of the phrase, "fishers of men." Jesus and the disciples would fish men out of destruction. If we are to take seriously His metaphor of fishing, the disciples would throw down nets and ensnare the souls of men. This indicates that God deals with men in much the same manner as a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee dealt with fish. The fisherman is in control, once the fish are in his nets. Jesus called them to serve as fishers of men's souls.

There should be high perceived value in such a calling. The importance of rescuing the souls of men from destruction is very great. It was surely much greater than the value to be gained by catching and selling fish. There is no comparison, Jesus implied. The four brothers agreed with Him, and they immediately abandoned their nets, their colleagues, their ships, and their future as fishers of fish.

6. Chapter 11.

D. A Symbolic Act

This abandonment was a symbolic act. It was an act of lifetime commitment. The disciples would become the core unit in the founding of a new religious movement. They would eventually break from Judaism. They would also resist the polytheism of the Roman Empire. This required courage and dedication. So, the nature of this act was to abandon their previous occupations and to submit themselves to the authority of Jesus. They would not be the same. Their lives would not be the same. Their world would not be the same. This was symbolized by the fact that their occupations would not be the same.

What appears to be an irrational decision was in fact a highly rational decision. It was rational because of the authority of Jesus and the trust which these four men had in the words of Jesus. They trusted His words more than they trusted their nets and the supply of fish. This was altogether rational, but it was rational only on the assumption that Jesus represents God. He represents God as the Redeemer. Because the four men had some glimmer of understanding regarding the absolute nature of the authority which Jesus possessed, they readily abandoned their familiar surroundings.

This is what Paul meant years later, when he said that we are to sacrifice ourselves as a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1).[7] This is liturgical language. It has to do with the altar of the temple. If we are living sacrifices to God, then God should be pleased in the same way that the burnt offerings and other sacrifices of the temple pleased Him. In Mark's account, we learn that God publicly affirmed the fact that He was pleased with the ministry of Jesus (1:11; 6:22). Indirectly, as representatives of Jesus, and as subordinates of Jesus, the disciples participated in the pleasure that God showed for Jesus. They received favor from the King.

Conclusion

Jesus called the four fishermen into lifetime service in a non-profit ministry. They abandoned their occupations. They exchanged an occupation for a calling.

In doing this, the had little time to count the costs of their actions. They forfeited whatever income they might have gained as fisherman. They gained whatever income they would receive as disciples. They

7. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 8.

made a rapid decision. This was consistent with the magnitude of the disparity between the two streams of income.

Their decision was based on mutual trust. Jesus trusted them. They trusted Jesus. They exercised exceptional faith from the very beginning. This degree of faith was important for their perseverance as saints.

The success indicators for a calling are not numerical, unlike success indicators for most occupations. Men must trust their non-numerical judgment in allocating their time and capital to their callings.

2

PRICING AND DEMAND

And there came a leper to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean. And as soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed. And he straitly charged him, and forthwith sent him away; And saith unto him, See thou say nothing to any man: but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them. But he went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places: and they came to him from every quarter.

MARK 1:40–45

The theocentric principle here was sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.[1]. This passage is the first of several with the same theme: the tremendous demand for Jesus' services as a healer.[2]

A. Responding to Others' Needs

Jesus performed miracles of healing. He also performed miracles of feeding. These miracles validated His ministry. They added evidence that His claims were trustworthy. He asked people to have faith in God and faith in His ministry. To secure their trust, He performed miracles. The cost of increasing people's trust in Him was the sacrifice if His privacy and His time.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Mark 6:55–56; 7:32–36.

Jesus healed the leper at the request of the leper. He did not seek out an opportunity to heal. On the contrary, the leper sought out the opportunity for Jesus to heal. The leper recognized in Jesus the supernatural ability to heal the human body. He suffered from the most feared of all diseases in ancient Israel. He was an outcast because of his disease (Lev. 13:46).[3] The only way for him to regain his health and to regain his legal standing was to be healed.

Jesus was moved by compassion, the text says. He put out His hand and touched the leper. Lepers in Israel were required to announce their physical and legal status by shouting "unclean, unclean" whenever they came near to anyone else (Lev. 13:45). This leper had to announce his condition in order to be healed. Jesus nevertheless reached out and touched the man. He verbally commanded the man to be cleaned. The text says that as soon as He had spoken, the leprosy departed.

At this point, Jesus gave him instructions. The instructions were clear. Jesus told him to go to the priest and make the appropriate sacrifices. This was required by the Mosaic law (Lev. 14:10–32). Jesus did not violate the Mosaic law. This healing was to be a testimony to the priests. But He told the man not to say anything about the healing to anyone else. Nevertheless, the man went out and began to tell others about the miracle. Word spread so fast that Jesus could no longer go into the city. The crowds were too thick. He went into the desert, and still the people came to Him from around the region.

B. Free Goods and High Demand

This healing established a pattern. When Jesus came into a community and healed anyone, the demand for His services rose rapidly. He was offering a unique service: deliverance from sickness and even birth defects. No one else could offer such services with the same degree of reliability. Under any circumstances, demand for His services would have risen dramatically. But He offered these services free of charge. The definition of *scarcity* is this: *greater demand than supply at zero price*. Jesus offered something of exceptional value at zero price. The result was predictable. Many people thronged to gain the blessing of physical deliverance.

Jesus was in a situation analogous to the condition Moses had been in, when Moses served as the judge for all of Israel free of charge. The

3. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 9.

lines of people were very long in front of his tent. His father-in-law, Jethro the priest, warned him that this would wear him out. It would also wear out the people. He recommended that Moses set up a system of hierarchical courts that would take most of the cases under consideration. Moses did so (Ex. 18).[4]

Jesus was not yet in a position to set up any system of hierarchy that would reduce the demand for His services. Later, He did this, when He empowered the disciples and others to perform healings (Mark 3:15; Matt. 10:1–8). But, at this early stage of His ministry, He did not do this. So, all of the demand for healing was concentrated on Him. The number of people who wanted to be healed at zero price was very large.

Jesus warned the leper not to tell anyone else. He knew what the man would do, but He made sure that He was not the initiator of what soon became a sensation. He responded to this demand in many instances, but He did not originally initiate it. In some cases, He did His best to escape from the demand, but as this passage indicates, His efforts were unsuccessful. People sought Him out, despite the fact that He went into the desert in order to avoid them.

There were times when He preached to large crowds. In two instances, He performed a miracle in order to feed them.[5] Word also spread regarding these miracles. The miracle increased the demand for His services as a political messiah. "Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world. When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone" (John 6:14–15). He did not want this demand, and He did his best to avoid it. But He knew the this demand was a direct result of His ability to feed large numbers of people through a miracle. He understood fully that the masses did not come to Him seeking political deliverance because of anything He said. The people were not looking for bread and circuses. They were looking for bread and revolution.

C. Building an Audience

His ability and willingness to heal people added to His authority. This validated His ministry. It increased people's trust in what He

4. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 19.

5. Chapter 9.

said. This was *word and deed evangelism*. Effective long-term evangelism always is. By performing the miracles of healing free of charge, He built up His ministry. He did not initially seek to build up His ministry in this way, but this became a major factor in people's willingness to listen to what He had to say.

Some people may have approached Him for healing, but they were also willing to listen. This was like a rescue mission, where men in search of a free meal sit through a sermon, which is always presented first. But, unlike a rescue mission, some people came mainly to listen. A few even decided to join His following. They needed attention. This required time. There is no such thing as free time.

On the one hand, His healing ability increased His audience. On the other hand, it decreased the time that He had to teach the disciples and others who were interested in hearing His message of deliverance. He needed a way to share the responsibility and burden of healing people, yet He knew that by performing miracles, He would increase His audience.

There is a limited supply of physical healing. There is tremendous demand for physical healing by people who are afflicted. If someone has the ability to heal in the way that Jesus did, he can expect to spend the rest of his days surrounded by people who want to be healed. Because Jesus did this free of charge, only geographical barriers could serve as a way to reduce the demand for healing services. This is why He fled into the wilderness.

He knew that most people sought out His services of healing rather than His services of teaching. He knew they were interested in physical deliverance rather than spiritual deliverance. His ability to offer physical deliverance reinforced His claim of authority to teach. People understood that He was especially gifted in healing people. They therefore assembled to hear what He had to say about other matters. So, in this sense, his ability and willingness to heal people reinforced His spiritual message. This made Him seem trustworthy.

Jesus did not tell the crowds to worship Him as God. He was entitled to such worship, but He did not seek it. On some occasions, He affirmed His legal status as the Son of God,[6] but He did so in such a way that He did not declare openly that He is God. Nevertheless,

6. "But he held his peace, and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14:61–62). "Jesus said unto them, Verily,verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58).

the Jewish authorities understood the implications of what He was claiming, and they sought to silence Him and finally to execute Him.

The message He preached survived because it was written down. Then it was read aloud to churches. Those who did the reading were not able to perform the healing services that Jesus performed. The epistle of James did establish a formal healing liturgy (James 5:14), but the church has never had the same degree of success in healing people that Jesus experienced. Healing launched Christianity, but it has only rarely extended Christianity. The church still has grown.

There is always a trade-off between money and time. Jesus did not charge anything for His services, so He had to donate time. People did not have to pay money for His services, but they had to spend time to seek Him out, especially during those periods in which He was in the wilderness. There are no free lunches in life, other than the grant of salvation. That grant had to be paid for by Jesus at Calvary.

We make choices about how to gain whatever it is we want. We can spend more time shopping for discount prices, or we can save time by purchasing at retail prices. The more valuable a person's time, the less time he should spend searching out bargains. Jesus' time was extremely valuable, but He nevertheless devoted time to healing people. He did not charge money for these services. He demonstrated through healing the supernatural nature of His ministry. He also demonstrated that He was a servant. His ministry of service was a model for the ministries of His followers. The means of spreading the gospel of spiritual deliverance from the bondage of sin is sacrificial service. Jesus sacrificed time for the sake of serving the afflicted.

D. The Economists' Dilemma

Economists have difficulty explaining such behavior. They would probably explain Jesus' behavior as being motivated by the desire to establish a new religious movement. The healing ministry reinforced the preaching ministry. The healing ministry multiplied the audience available for the teaching ministry. The economist would say that this was a self-interested strategy.

The question then arises: What was Jesus' motivation for coming into history to be crucified? Who was the beneficiary? His ministry does not make sense to economists, unless they assume that His primary goal in life was personal fame. But why would someone seek fame through a needless death? Why would anybody go out of his way to heal people, only to gain notoriety for a message that would

motivate His enemies to have Him executed? This makes no economic sense.

When someone invests time and money in order to make more money, the economist is satisfied with the conventional explanation: *self-interest*. When someone invests time and money in order to make so much money that he purchases lots of leisure time at the end of his life, the economist accepts this as a rational economic strategy. But when someone invests time without having any strategy for increasing the flow of money, and simultaneously risks his life, thereby cutting short his available time, the economist finds it difficult to explain the person's motivation. He surely has trouble explaining the motivation of the person's full-time followers. Even more difficult to explain is the degree of sacrifice demonstrated by his posthumous followers. What is the point?

Conclusion

Because Jesus' actions do appear to be economically irrational—sacrificial rather than self-interested—it is not just the economists who are baffled. This was part of Jesus' strategy of evangelism. *It is precisely the seeming irrationality of the ministry that gains followers for the ministry*. Paul said that the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. He also said that Christians are fools in the eyes of those who are perishing (I Cor. 1:18).[7] This foolishness calls attention to the magnitude of the claims of those people who donate time and money to the cause of Christ. The very strangeness of their behavior gains them an audience. The audience wants to know why. The answer has to do with service to God through service to others.

To exercise faith is to exercise trust. Jesus used miracles to increase people's trust in Him, His Father, and His ministry. Later, the disciples performed similar miracles as part of their evangelism. They sacrificed their time and privacy for the sake of the kingdom.

7. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 1.

3

CALLING VS. OCCUPATION[1]

> *And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him. And it came to pass, that, as Jesus sat at meat in his house, many publicans and sinners sat also together with Jesus and his disciples: for there were many, and they followed him.*
>
> MARK 2:14–15

The theocentric principle here was obedience to God's call. God possesses the lawful authority to call us into His service. We are required to heed this call. It takes trust to do this. In the case of Levi, it took exceptional trust. Authority is point two of the biblical covenant.[2]

A. Publicans

Levi was a publican: a tax collector. Tax collectors were hated more in the ancient world than they are today. Today's tax collector is the agent of an elected government. This provides a degree of legitimacy to the tax system that Rome did not possess in the eyes of tribute-paying foreigners. The government initially sold to companies the right to collect taxes. These companies bid for this privilege. The government collected its revenue in advance from the bidders, who in turn sent agents out to collect the taxes from the people. This system is known in retrospect as tax farming.

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1. This is adapted from Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 21.

2. . Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economic, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1982] 2010), ch. 2.

Tax farming had prevailed under the Roman Republic. Investors in a tax farming company expected to reap more than they sowed. If the group's bid won the privilege of collecting taxes from a particular region, the investors expected to collect more money than they had paid to Rome. Tax farmers were allowed considerable discretion in establishing the amount of taxes owed by any individual. They estimated how much they could collect before they placed their bids.

The Roman government had stood behind these tax farmers. A revolt against the tax man, then as now, was a revolt against civil government's authority. But publicans were businessmen. They represented a profit-seeking business as well as the government. Their job was to extract as much money as they could from taxpayers. There was no government tax code. They were not bureaucratic agents of the state. The taxpayers were at a great disadvantage in dealing with them.

Under such a system, tax collectors had an incentive to overcharge taxpayers, and taxpayers had an incentive to lie. Many taxpayers would have known about the nature of the tax farming system. It was to the taxpayers' advantage to pay as little as possible. If tax revenues dropped, the bids at the next tax farming auction might be lower. What was it to them if some profit-seeking Roman monopoly made less profit than its investors had hoped? If Rome collected less as a result, the tributaries would shed no tears.

The tax farming system was abolished under Augustus in Christ's day. He substituted tax collecting by local governments, which then paid the central government. This system was less arbitrary than the tax farming system had been.[3] But there was still a possibility that local tax collectors might overcharge taxpayers, just as their predecessors had done under the tax farming system. John the Baptist recognized this temptation and dealt with it openly: "Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you" (Luke 3:12–13).[4] The tax collector in the Roman world was assumed to be dishonest. John's comment went to the heart of this distrust. But he did not tell them that they were immoral for being tax collectors. He told them only they were immoral if they raised taxes on their own

3. James Macdonald, *A Free Nation Deep in Debt: The Financial Roots of Democracy* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2003), p. 54.

4. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 2.

authority and then kept the difference. At every level, he implied, the rule of law should be honored. Tax collectors should know in advance what they are expected to collect. This means that taxpayers should know in advance what they are required to pay. *The predictability of law is to apply to taxation*. The tax farming system was inherently corrupt because it made possible theft on a massive scale. The system imposed the monopolistic force of law without the rule of law.

B. Occupation

There is a familiar saying in English that is equally true in every other language: "Nothing is certain except death and taxes." Every civil government must collect taxes in some form. Taxpayers prefer to keep more of their wealth than less, so they resist the imposition of taxes. Although they know that some taxation is necessary for their protection, they prefer to have other taxpayers pay. They resent taxes, and they resent tax collectors.

A Jew who served as a tax collector would have been especially resented in Israel. Most of all, a member of the tribe of Levi would have been resented. Levi was the priestly tribe. The parallel account in Matthew says that Levi was also named Matthew (Matt. 9:9).[5] Matthew refers to himself as Matthew the publican (Matt. 10:3).

Levi was sitting at a table, collecting taxes. As soon as he heard Jesus' call, he walked away from his job. But he did more than this, according to Luke's account (Luke 5:27). He left the money behind. Then he invited in fellow publicans to hear Jesus. In doing so, He gave Jesus another opportunity to confront the religious leaders of the nation. "And after these things he went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me. **And he left all**, rose up, and followed him. And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them. But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners? And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:27–32; cf. Matt. 9:9–13). Levi left it all behind. Then he had a party.[6]

5. Matthew was one of three brothers who became apostles. He was the son of Althaeus (Matt. 10:13; Mark 2:14). James was the son of Althaeus (Luke 6:15). Judas (not Iscariot) was the son of Althaeus (v. 16).

6. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 7.

Matthew-Levi recognized that Jesus was offering him a higher calling. He was making money at his job. He probably was making a lot of money. He left the money behind. He owed most of it to his superiors unless he was extremely crooked, skimming off receipts. By walking away from it, he became liable to make up the difference out of his own capital. He must have had capital. He could also afford to entertain guests at a feast. He invited other tax collectors, and they came. He was probably not a low-level official. He had money to spend on entertaining and gaining influence among his peers.

Why did he walk away from his money? That was an odd thing to do. He could have turned it in. Instead, he left it sitting there. Perhaps he thought that no one would steal it. But that took considerable faith on his part. Fear of Roman soldiers might have restrained men from reaching into the box[7] to grab a handful of coins, but such theft would be difficult to prove unless soldiers were present next to Levi, which no text indicates. He must have counted the cost of losing the money that he had collected so far.

Leaving the money behind was a symbolic act. To pick up a box of money would not have required much effort. He did not pick it up. He walked away from it. He soon joined the disciples (Luke 6:15). He became an apostle (Acts 1:13). Visibly, he switched sides: from Rome to Jesus. He did so in a way that could not have failed to gain attention. Word about a Levite publican who had walked away from a box of money would have spread very fast.

Jesus had called him. He heeded the call immediately. He did not hesitate. Others did. "And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:59–62).[8]

Levi's occupation was tax collecting. He left it for a calling: to be a disciple of Jesus. There was a conflict between the two. He would have found it difficult to remain a tax collector and become a disciple. Surely, he could not have been part of Jesus' closest associates, for Jesus was constantly on the move. He could not have become an

7. I assume that he had a box or other container for the money. This is not a major assumption.

8. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 20.

apostle. But Matthew did not know anything about the apostolate. All he knew was that Jesus had called him.

When he invited other publicans to come to a party, they came. Word must have spread to them, too. One of their colleagues had walked off the job, leaving the money behind. Why? Then he invited them to come to dinner and meet the man who had called him. Here was an opportunity to get answers to their question.

Tax collectors had a bad reputation in Israel. The scribes and Pharisees linked publicans with sinners (Luke 18:10–11). Jesus did not deny this link. On the contrary, He affirmed it. "And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican" (Matt. 18:17). Instead, He turned their criticism against them. He was a physician who healed the sick. The guests were on the list of the sick. His critics were not on the guest list. They did not regard themselves as sick men; thus, they believed that they had no need of a physician. They were critical of the Great Physician's methods of healing, including sharing a meal with tax collectors. Jesus was condemning them. They were as sick as the guests. They were in need of healing.

Matthew had humbled himself before Jesus by walking off the job. As a man protected by Roman troops, he possessed great authority. He would soon possess greater authority as an apostle. But the road to this authority was a walk into unemployment. He possessed wealth. He would soon possess a share of God's kingdom. But that kingdom was barely visible. He had a choice of two masters: God or mammon. He chose God. There is no clearer New Testament example of a man who made the correct choice in the face of such an explicit set of circumstances. He was the opposite of the rich young ruler, who made the incorrect choice.[9]

C. Calling

Jesus had important tasks for Matthew-Levi. The most important, presumably, was writing the first Gospel.[10] But Jesus did not call to him with this offer: "Leave the money behind, and you'll be able to write the first book in the New Testament, a book that will re-shape the world. Your name will be known by millions of people down through the ages." He just called him to follow. Matthew heeded the call.

9. Chapter 13.

10. Because the Matthew account alone refers to the tax collector as Matthew rather than Levi, Bible scholars have assumed that he was the author of the book.

1. The Cost of Discipleship

What was the most profitable thing Matthew could have done: collect taxes or write the first Gospel? In retrospect, most people would probably say "write the book." Men want to be remembered favorably. Fame is a powerful lure; so is a good reputation. Combine the two, and you have a powerful offer. Jesus did not verbally offer the first. The second—a good reputation—was part of the deal, but only by comparison to the universally bad reputation of tax collectors. He would go from being despised by nearly everyone to being misunderstood by many and hated by a few.

To gain this long-term profit—fame and a good name—he would have to pay. What he paid was the income that he would otherwise have received. This payment was symbolized by the box of money he left behind. That abandoned box of money was an earnest—a down payment—on all the other money that he would not receive.

He entered a world of far greater uncertainty. He had been a tax collector. This was one of the more certain occupations in Rome.[11] Income was assured: a form of rent. In contrast, it was not clear to him where the income would come from as Jesus' disciple, wandering the roads of Judaea. Matthew became an entrepreneur. He chose uncertainty over rent. He ceased being a Roman bureaucrat.

There was no question that he was not going to have the same level of money income as a follower of Jesus. He knew that. He demonstrated this understanding by walking away from the money box. He was abandoning his occupation. Why? Because he had been called to something more profitable. He had received a higher calling.

His calling was in opposition to his occupation. What do I mean by his calling? I mean that way of life and that work which Jesus would assign to him. This was the most important work he could do. He could make more money on the old job, but this work was not very important compared to Jesus' work. Money income was higher as a tax collector, but money income was less profitable to him than Jesus' work. He was faced with a choice: occupation or calling. He chose the calling.

I define that calling as follows: *the most important work a person can do in which he would be most difficult to replace*.[12] The account of Mat-

11. Two centuries later, it was equally certain but one of the most burdensome occupations. Tax collectors had to pay the state, despite their future revenue, which fell as Rome became impoverished. It became an inherited office which could not be abandoned. It became a form of slavery.

12. Gary North, "The Calling," *Christian Reconstruction* (March/April 1981).

thew's calling is illustrative of this definition. Jesus had a new career for him. His old career was profitable financially, but he could be replaced. There is no doubt that the tax collecting agency hired a replacement. We do not know his name. He is no longer important. He was important to himself, his employers, and the taxpayers, but he is no longer important. He left no visible legacy. Matthew did.

The Gospel of Matthew cannot be replaced. The other three Gospels supplement it, but they did not replace it. It is only in Matthew's account that we are told of the virgin birth of Christ, although one passage in Luke presupposes the virgin birth: "And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli" (Luke 3:23). It is only in Matthew that we read the account of the Great Commission: "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matt. 28:18–20).[13] Can you imagine the history of the church without these two passages?

2. High Bid Wins

Matthew's choice was not based on monetary income. The organization that employed him paid more money than Jesus offered. Jesus offered nothing in the way of monetary compensation. This is typical for most people. Their place of highest-value service is rarely their place of greatest monetary income.

A bidding war was in progress. The organization that employed him had bid up his income to keep him in a job that suffered from a major social liability. Jesus offered him nothing except discipleship. He had a choice: remain a social pariah or become a social eccentric. Go with the money or go with . . . what? God and mammon were bidding against each other. The high bid wins, but the individual must decide in terms of his own scale of values what the high bid is. Rarely is the high monetary bid the high bid from God's point of view. "And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Matt. 19:24).[14]

13. Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Greatness of the Great Commission* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990).

14. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 38.

Callings are only occasionally salary-producing occupations, such as minister of the gospel or teacher. Because so few men are ever directly confronted with a choice between calling and occupation, they do not think much about their callings. They may think more about this when they reach their mid-40s, when they see their mortality more clearly. But the kind of life-changing decision that Matthew made is rare. Few men ever hear the call of God so plainly.

D. The Division of Labor

The division of labor has increased dramatically in the modern world ever since the late eighteenth century. Occupations have become more specialized. Low-level or entry-level jobs have become plentiful. It does not take seven years of apprenticeship training to teach a person to be a clerk in a fast food restaurant. It takes just a few days. But it takes far more training to become a physician than it did in medieval times. The assembly line of the modern factory has made average men productive, but factory jobs tend to move to less developed nations or regions. It takes more education and on-the-job training to become a knowledge worker than an assembly-line worker.

As specialization increases, people find more opportunities to exercise their talents. They achieve greater productivity because their creativity progressively matches customer demand. They find their niche in the labor market. This benefits customers, who gain a wider selection of products and services to choose from, and more highly skilled producers working to serve them.

Were it not for the decrease in the cost of information, it would be increasingly difficult to replace workers in the capital-intensive job market. Information costs have dropped, however, offsetting the fact that the closer a person's skills match the requirements of the production process, the more difficult it is to find his replacement. To retain him in the production process, his employer must pay him enough to keep him from seeking employment elsewhere. Because of more accurate and more widely available information about rates of pay, people can bargain to their advantage with employers. Meanwhile, employers can locate replacements. The zones of ignorance have narrowed, meaning that workers are paid closer to what their services are worth to the customer by way of the employer. Only a few people in the organization provide such unique services that the organization's decision-makers cannot replace them readily.

Job-switching is common today. Men seek out better-paying jobs.

They are not locked into one job for life. When a person asks: "What is my most productive area of service?" he means for a few years. Men change their occupations and their specialties within organizations.

The bidding war for jobs goes on, day by day. The results can be seen in the price of labor. But nothing comparable exists for the bidding system for callings. There is no visible indicator comparable to the money wage. There is no numerical value that men can place on the calling. While there has been an increase in information regarding callings, there is nothing comparable to the wage system.

With the increase in the division of labor, callings have become more specialized. But without a unique numerical success indicator, the participants and would-be participants in the market for highest service are still as blind, comparatively, as Matthew was. When God calls us into service, He does not present us with an employment contract enforceable in a court of law, with fringe benefits listed. He just says, "Hey, you! Come." There is great uncertainty. Why some men respond while others do not remains a mystery. They do not base this decision on quantitative measures. There is some unexplained factor that is at work in God's issuing of a call. "The secret things belong unto the LORD our God" (Deut. 29:29a).

Because we cannot know the future exhaustively, an element of faith exists in every decision. What distinguishes market decisions is the degree of specificity possible in assessing the future. There are prices. Prices are the result of men's decisions regarding the present value of expected future supply and demand. Men bid for resources in terms of these assessments. The result of this bidding process is an array of prices. So, there is less faith required to make a market decision than a decision regarding the calling. Accepting a calling is more like taking a wife than hiring a housekeeper. The potential is greater, a mistake is more permanent, and the terms of employment are less specific.

Conclusion

Levi-Matthew had to make a decision. He had to assess the call of Christ and compare its potential with that of his occupation. No decision would still have been a decision: to stay right where he was. He made his decision in an instant. We are not told what factors motivated him. Maybe it was only that Christ had called him, despite his position as a social outcast. Maybe he had been looking for a way out the tax collection field. Or maybe it was something beyond his own

power to explain. He wrote the autobiographical account, yet he did not explain his motivation.

Jesus' call persuaded him to act in terms of his priorities. Because he had not sought out Jesus, I assume that the call initiated a major shift in these priorities. The visible indicator of this shift was the money box. The more radical the shift, the less likely that he would take the box with him. Would he trust Jesus or mammon?

He trusted Jesus. He trusted Jesus more than he trusted his employer, his money, or his reputation as a sane man. He walked away from his safe occupation for the sake of his uncertain calling. He thought his future was certain, because he trusted Jesus. For an outsider, this made no sense, but it was a powerful personal testimony.

4

OPEN FIELDS AT HARVEST TIME[1]

> *And it came to pass, that he went through the corn fields on the sabbath day; and his disciples began, as they went, to pluck the ears of corn. And the Pharisees said unto him, Behold, why do they on the sabbath day that which is not lawful? And he said unto them, Have ye never read what David did, when he had need, and was an hungred, he, and they that were with him? How he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and did eat the shewbread, which is not lawful to eat but for the priests, and gave also to them which were with him? And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.*
>
> MARK 2:23–28

The theocentric principle of this passage was stated clearly a few verses later: "For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day" (Matt. 12:8). It is God and God's work that govern the sabbath and its judicial applications. This is point four of the biblical covenant: sanctions.[2]

The Pharisees did not criticize the disciples for stealing. The Mosaic law exempted this activity from the laws of theft. "When thou comest into thy neighbour's vineyard, then thou mayest eat grapes thy fill at thine own pleasure; but thou shalt not put any in thy vessel. When thou comest into the standing corn of thy neighbour, then thou mayest pluck the ears with thine hand; but thou shalt not move a sickle unto thy neighbour's standing corn" (Deut. 23:24–25).

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1. This is adapted from Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 26.

2. . Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

Because of the importance of this passage for a correct understanding of the Bible's view of private property, I am reprinting Chapter 59 of my commentary on Deuteronomy. Some readers may not have access to that book. I have reprinted the entire chapter.

The theocentric principle undergirding this law is that God, as the owner of the creation, has the exclusive right to specify the terms of the leases that He offers to his stewards. He establishes boundaries.

A. Rural Leaseholds in Israel

This law announced certain terms of God's rural leasehold. It announced to the land owner: "You do not possess absolute sovereignty over this land. Your neighbor has the right to pick a handful of grain or grapes from this field. Your right to exclude others by law or force is limited." In this sense, God delegated to a farmer's neighbors the right to enforce God's claim of exclusive control over a *symbolic portion* of every field. The land owner could not lawfully exclude God's delegated representatives from access to his crops. The fact that he could not lawfully exclude them testified to his lack of absolute sovereignty over his property.

In the garden of Eden, God placed a judicial boundary around one tree. A symbolic portion of the garden was reserved by God. This boundary was there to remind Adam that he could not legitimately assert control over the entire garden. Over most of it, Adam did exercise full authority. But over one small part, he did not. It was off-limits to him. Adam's acceptance of this limitation on his authority was basic to his continued residence in the garden. More than this: it was basic to his life.

God interacted with man on a face-to-face basis in the garden. He no longer deals with man in this way. Instead, God has established a system of representative authority that substitutes for a verbal "no trespassing" sign around a designated tree. The neighbor is God's agent who comes into another man's field and announces, in effect: "This field does not belong exclusively to you. As the original owner, God has a valid legal claim on it. So do I, as God's agent."

In this text, God forbade land owners from excluding visitors from their fields. A visitor had the right to pick something to eat during the harvest season. He lawfully reaped the fruits of another person's land, labor, and capital. The legal boundaries that delineated the owner-

ship of a field did not restrict access by the visitor. The visitor had a legal claim on a small portion of the harvest. He had to appear in person to collect this portion. Put a different way, *outsiders were co-owners of a portion of every field's pickable crop*.

One question that I deal with later in this chapter is whether this law was a cross-boundary law rather than a seed law or land law.[3] If it was a cross-boundary law, then God was making this law universal in its jurisdiction. He was announcing this system of land tenure in His capacity as the owner of the whole earth, not just as the owner of the Promised Land.

B. Exclusion by Conquest

The Israelites were about to inherit the Promised Land through military conquest. Their forthcoming inheritance would be based on the disinheritance of the Canaanites. The specified means of this transfer of ownership was genocide. It was not merely that the Canaanites were to be excluded from the land; they were to be excluded from history. More to the point, theologically speaking, their gods were to be excluded from history (Josh. 23:5–7).

The Israelites would soon enjoy a military victory after a generation of miraculous wandering in the wilderness (Deut. 8:4). There could be no legitimate doubt in the future that God had arranged this transfer of the inheritance. He was therefore the land's original owner. They would henceforth hold their land as sharecroppers: 10% percent of the net increase in the crop was to go to God through the Levitical priesthood. This was Levi's inheritance (Num. 18:21).[4]

Before the conquest began, God placed certain restrictions on the use of His holy land: *the formal terms of the lease*. As the owner of both the land and the people who occupied it, God's restrictions were designed to protect the long-term productivity of His assets. Yet He imposed these laws for their sakes, too. Land-owning Israelites had to rest the land every seventh year (Lev. 25:4).[5] They had to allow poverty-stricken gleaners to come onto their land and pick up the leftovers of the crops (Lev. 19:9–10;[6] 23:22;[7] Deut. 24:21).

3. On the difference, see Appendix J.

4. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 10.

5. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 23.

6. *Ibid*., ch. 11.

7. *Ibid*., ch. 22.

This passage further erased the legal boundary between the land's owners and non-owners. Whatever a neighbor could pick and hold in his hands was his to take prior to the harvest. He had legal title to this share of his neighbor's crop. This portion did not belong to the land owner. Ownership of land, seeds, and prior labor did not entitle him to that portion of the crop which a neighbor could pick and hold in his hands. That is, *his prior investment was not the legal basis of his ownership*.

God's promise to Abraham and the nation's military conquest of Canaan were the joint legal basis of Israel's rural land ownership. Legal title in Israel had nothing to do with some hypothetical original owner who had gained legal title because he had mixed his labor with unowned land—John Locke's theory of original ownership.[8] There had once been Canaanites in the land, whose legal title was visibly overturned by the conquest. The Canaanites were to be disinherited, Moses announced. They would not be allowed to inherit, because they could not lawfully be neighbors. The conquest's dispossession of the gods of Canaan definitively overturned any theory of private ownership that rested on a story of man's original ownership based on his own labor. The kingdom grant preceded any man's work. The promise preceded the inheritance. In short, *grace preceded law*.

The neighbor in Mosaic Israel was a legal co-participant in the kingdom grant. He lived under the authority of God. His presence in the land helped to extend the kingdom in history. The land was being subdued by men who were willing to work under God's law. The exclusion of the Canaanites had been followed by the inclusion of the Israelites and even resident aliens. Canaan was more than Canaanites. It was also the land. The conquest of Canaan was more than a military victory; it was a process of kingdom extension. The fruits of the land belonged to all residents in the land. The bulk of these fruits belonged to land owners, but not all of the fruits.

In this sense, the resident who owned no land, but who had legal access to the land, was analogous to the beast that was employed to plow the land. "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn" (Deut. 25:4).[9] Although the neighbor was not employed by the land owner, he was part of the overall dominion process inside Israel. The fact that God had included him inside Canaan made it more difficult for those who served other gods to occupy the land. A

8. John Locke, *On Civil Government: Second Treatise* (1690), section 27.
9. Chapter 63.

man's access to the civil courts and to the fruits of the field gave him a stake in the land, something worth defending. Israel was no pluralistic democracy. It was a theocracy. No law but God's could lawfully be enforced by the state. Only God's name could be lawfully invoked publicly inside Israel's boundaries (Ex. 23:13). By remaining inside the land, a resident was publicly acknowledging his allegiance to Israel's God rather than to another god. He was acknowledging God's legal claim on him. God in turn gave him a legal claim on a small portion of the output of the land.

C. Jesus and the Corn

Verse 25 is the partial background for one of Jesus' more perplexing confrontations with the Pharisees.

> And it came to pass on the second sabbath after the first, that he went through the corn fields; and his disciples plucked the ears of corn, and did eat, rubbing them in their hands. And certain of the Pharisees said unto them, Why do ye that which is not lawful to do on the sabbath days? And Jesus answering them said, Have ye not read so much as this, what David did, when himself was an hungred, and they which were with him; How he went into the house of God, and did take and eat the shewbread, and gave also to them that were with him; which it is not lawful to eat but for the priests alone? And he said unto them, That the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath (Luke 6:1–5).[10]

The Pharisees did not accuse the disciples of theft; rather, they accused the disciples of not keeping the sabbath. Had the disciples been guilty of theft, their critics would have taken advantage of this opportunity to embarrass Jesus through His disciples' actions, which the disciples had done right in front of Him. The reason why they did not accuse the disciples of theft was that in terms of the Mosaic law, the disciples had not committed theft. Their infraction, according to the Pharisees, was picking grain on the sabbath. Picking grain was a form of work.

1. David and the Showbread

Jesus' response was to cite an obscure Old Testament incident: David's confiscation of the showbread. The circumstances surrounding that incident are even more perplexing to the commentators than Jesus' walk through the field. David was fleeing from Saul. David lied

10. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 8.

to a priest and confiscated the showbread, which was always to be on the table of the Lord (Ex. 25:30).[11]

> Then came David to Nob to Ahimelech the priest: and Ahimelech was afraid at the meeting of David, and said unto him, Why art thou alone, and no man with thee? And David said unto Ahimelech the priest, The king hath commanded me a business, and hath said unto me, Let no man know any thing of the business whereabout I send thee, and what I have commanded thee: and I have appointed my servants to such and such a place. Now therefore what is under thine hand? give me five loaves of bread in mine hand, or what there is present. And the priest answered David, and said, There is no common bread under mine hand, but there is hallowed bread; if the young men have kept themselves at least from women. And David answered the priest, and said unto him, Of a truth women have been kept from us about these three days, since I came out, and the vessels of the young men are holy, and the bread is in a manner common, yea, though it were sanctified this day in the vessel. So the priest gave him hallowed bread: for there was no bread there but the shewbread, that was taken from before the LORD, to put hot bread in the day when it was taken away (I Sam. 21:1–6).

Jesus was implying that David had not done anything wrong in this incident, either by lying to a priest about his mission or by taking what belonged to God. David invoked the status of his men as holy warriors on the king's official business, which was why the priest raised the issue of their contact with women. David's answer—they had had no contact with women for three days—pointed back to the three days of abstinence prior to the giving of the law at Sinai (Ex. 19:15). David, as God's anointed heir of the throne of Israel (I Sam. 16), possessed kingly authority. Jonathan, Saul's formally lawful heir, had just re-confirmed his *inheritance-transferring oath* with David (I Sam. 20:42).[12] Because of this oath, David had the authority to lie to a priest and to take the showbread for himself and his men, even though Saul was still on the throne. David acted lawfully. David acted as Jacob had acted when he tricked Isaac into giving him the blessing which was lawfully his by revelation and voluntary transfer by Esau (Gen. 27).

The priest said that there was no common bread available. This indicates that this was a sabbath day: no cooking. There was no fresh

11. There was not enough bread to save their lives from starvation. These loaves were not, in and of themselves, crucial for David's survival. But as one meal among many, the bread was part of a program of survival. These loaves might not be the last ones confiscated by David.

12. The original covenant had been marked by Jonathan's gift of his robe to David, symbolizing the robe of authority, as well as his sword (I Sam. 18:3–4).

bread or hot bread, which was why the showbread was still there: it had not been replaced by hot bread. So, David asked for holy bread on a sabbath. There was no question about it: he was asking for holy bread on a holy day in the name of the king. The priest gave it to him. On what legal basis? The text does not say, but David's invoking of Saul's authority indicates that a man on a king's mission possessed lawful authority to receive bread set aside for God if there was no other bread available. God had said, "thou shalt set upon the table shewbread before me alway" (Ex. 25:30). But this situation was an exception which the priest acknowledged as valid. The desire of the king's men superseded this ritual requirement.

Down through the centuries, Protestant Bible commentators have struggled with the story of David and the showbread. They have accused David of being a sinful liar. Puritan commentator Matthew Poole called David's lie to the priest a "plain lie."[13] John Gill, a Calvinistic Baptist and master of rabbinic literature, referred to David's lie as a "downright lie, and was aggravated by its being told only for the sake of getting a little food; and especially to a high priest, and at the tabernacle of God. . . . This shows the weakness of the best men, when left to themselves. . . ."[14] Neither commentator criticized David for taking the showbread on the sabbath, which was the judicial heart of the matter. Christ sanctioned this action retroactively, which puts Christian commentators in a bind. So, they focus instead on David's lie, just as commentators focus on Rahab's lie, while refusing to raise their voices in protest against the significant ethical issue: her treason. This is a common blindness among pietistic commentators: straining at ethical gnats and swallowing what appear to be ethical camels.[15]

The Pharisees did not criticize David's actions. Jesus cited this incident in defense of His actions. *His answer indicates that He was declaring His own kingly authority*. As surely as David's anointing by Samuel on God's behalf had authorized him to deceive a priest and take the showbread on the sabbath, so had the Holy Spirit's anointing of Jesus authorized Him to have His disciples pick grain on the sabbath. As surely as the king's men were authorized to eat the showbread on the sabbath, so were Christ's disciples authorized to eat raw grain on the sabbath.

13. Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3 vols. (London: Banner of Truth Trust, [1683] 1962), I, p. 565.

14. John Gill, *An Exposition of the Old Testament*, 4 vols. (London: William Hill Collingridge, [1764] 1853), II, pp. 196–97.

15. Cf. Gary North, "In Defense of Biblical Bribery," in R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, 1973), especially pp. 838–42.

2. Lord of the Sabbath

Jesus then took the matter a step further: He announced that He was Lord of the Mosaic sabbath. This meant that He was announcing more than kingly authority. *He was declaring His messianic heirship at this point: the son of man, Lord of the Mosaic sabbath*. If David, as the prophetically anointed but not-yet publicly sanctioned king of Israel, possessed temporary authority over a priest for the sake of his lawful inheritance of the throne, far more did Jesus Christ, as messianic heir of the kingdom of God, possess authority over the sabbath in Israel.

One thing is certain: the judicial issue was not grain-stealing.

D. A Foretaste of Bread and Wine

A visitor eats grapes in the vineyard, but he cannot lawfully carry them off his neighbor's property. He cannot make wine with what he eats. Neither can two hands full of grain make a loaf of bread. This case law does not open a neighbor's field to all those who seek a finished meal. A free sample of the raw materials of such a meal is offered to visitors, but not the feast itself. *This is not a harvest in preparation for a feast; it is merely a symbol of a feast to come*. To prepare a feast, productive and successful people must bring to the kitchen sufficient fruits of the field. The full blessings of God are displayed at a feast. This case law does not offer a feast to the visitor. It offers a full stomach to a person walking in a field, but not a feast in a home or communion hall. It offers sufficient food to a hungry man to quiet the rumblings of his stomach, but it does not provide the means of celebration. It offers a token of a future feast. It is symbolic of blessings to come, a down payment or earnest of a future feast.

Grapes and grain point to the sacramental nature of the coming feast: a communion meal. The two crops singled out in this law are corn (grain) and grapes. The disciples picked corn, not wheat. Corn can be eaten raw; wheat cannot. The fact that these two crops are the raw materials for bread and wine is not some random aspect of this case law. *This law pointed forward to the communion feast of the New Covenant*. The Mosaic covenant was, in effect, the grain and grapes that pointed forward to the New Covenant's bread and wine. The New Covenant's bread and wine in turn point forward to the marriage supper of the lamb (Rev. 19:9). The communion table of God brings together people of a common confession and a common community who look forward to the eschatological consummation of the

kingdom of God in history at the end of time. So it was also in Mosaic Israel. The eschatological aspect of Deuteronomy, as the Pentateuch's book of the inheritance, provides a framework for interpreting this case law.

God gives to every man in history a foretaste of a holy meal to come: common grace. Not every man accepts God's invitation. Not every man is given access to God's table, either in history or eternity. The fellowship of God is closed to outsiders by means of a common confession that restricts strangers from lawful access to the table. But a free foretaste of the bounty of God's table at the consummate marriage supper of the Lamb is given to all those who walk in the open field and pick a handful of grain. A handful of this bounty is the common blessing of all mankind. This is the doctrine of common grace.[16]

The visitor is not allowed to bring a vessel to gather up the bounty of his neighbor's field. Neither is the covenant-breaker allowed access to the Lord's Supper. The visitor is allowed access to the makings of bread and wine. Similarly, the covenant-breaker is allowed into the church to hear the message of redemption. He may gain great benefits from his presence in the congregation, or he may leave spiritually unfed. So it is with the visitor in the field. "I take no man's charity," says one visitor to a field. "Religion is a crutch," says a visitor to a church.[17] Such a willful rejection of either blessing indicates a spirit of autonomy, a lack of community spirit, and a lack of a shared environment.

E. Neighborhood and Neighborliness

Grapes and grain remain ripe enough to eat in the field only for relatively short periods of time. Either they are not yet ripe or they have just been harvested. The neighbor in Israel was not allowed to bring a vessel to carry away the produce. The presumption was that the neighbor was visiting, became hungry, and ate his fill right there in the field. This is what Jesus' disciples did. The neighbor, unless very hungry, did not walk over to the neighbor's house three times a day to get a quick meal. He had his own crop to harvest. If he was landless, he might come into a field and eat. He could even bring his family.

16. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987).

17. A good reason for not passing a collection plate in church is that visitors may believe that a token payment will pay for "services rendered." So, for that matter, may non-tithing members.

The landless person would have gained access to free food, but only briefly, during the harvest season.

The two crops explicitly eligible for picking were above-ground crops. This law did not authorize someone to dig a root crop out of the ground. The eligible food was there, as we say in English, "for the picking." Were these two crops symbolic for all picked crops, or did the law authorize only grapes and grain? I think the two crops were symbols of every crop that can be picked in a field. The neighbor was like an ox that treaded out corn; he could not lawfully be muzzled (Deut. 25:4).[18] This meant that the hungry neighbor had a limited range of crops at his disposal. If he was also a local farmer, then his own crop was similarly exposed. His concerted effort to harm a neighbor by a misuse of this law would have exposed him to a tit-for-tat response. If he used this law as a weapon, it could be used against him.

Who was the neighbor? The Hebrew word, *rayah*, is most commonly used to describe a close friend or someone in the neighborhood. "Neither shalt thou desire thy neighbour's wife, neither shalt thou covet thy neighbour's house, his field, or his manservant, or his maidservant, his ox, or his ass, or any thing that is thy neighbour's" (Deut. 5:21). It can be translated as friend. "If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers" (Deut. 13:6). It was a next-door neighbor: "Thou shalt not remove thy neighbour's landmark, which they of old time have set in thine inheritance, which thou shalt inherit in the land that the LORD thy God giveth thee to possess it" (Deut. 19:14).[19]

But did it always mean this? In Jesus' answer to this question by the clever lawyer, He used the story of the Samaritan on a journey through Israel who helped a beaten man, in contrast to the priest and the Levite who ignored him (Luke 10). Jesus was arguing that *ethics*, not friendship, confession, or place of residence, defines the true neighbor. The Samaritan was the injured man's true neighbor because he helped him in his time of need.[20] The lawyer did not disagree with Jesus' assessment. He understood that this interpretation was consistent with the intent of the Mosaic law. This means that a

18. Chapter 63.
19. Chapter 44.
20. North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 21.

law-abiding man on the road in Mosaic Israel was a neighbor. The crop owner had to treat a man on a journey as if he were a local resident. This included even a foreigner.

The Greek word used to translate *rayah* in the Septuagint Greek translation of the Old Testament is *pleision*, which means "near, close by."[21] This indicates that the Jewish translators regarded the neighbor as a local resident. The neighbor was statistically most likely to be a fellow member of the tribe. Rural land could not be sold permanently. It could not be alienated: sold to an alien. The jubilee law regulated the inheritance of rural land (Lev. 25). This means that the neighbor in Mosaic Israel was statistically most likely a permanent resident of the community.

Nevertheless, this law opened the fields to people on a journey, just as the Samaritan was on a journey. As surely as the Samaritan was the injured man's neighbor, so was the land owner the hungry traveler's neighbor. This law was a reminder to the Israelites that God had been neighborly to them in their time of need. After the exile, such permanent geographical boundaries were maintained only if the occupying foreign army so decided. Jesus walked through the field under Rome's civil authority, not Israel's.

Why would God have designated these two above-ground crops as open to neighborly picking? This law made neighbors co-owners of the fruits of a man's land, labor, time, and capital. The land owner was legally unable to protect his wealth from the grasping hands of non-owners. He was left without legal recourse. Why? What judicial principle undergirded this case law? What benefit to the community did this law bring which offset the negative effects of a limitation of the protection of private property? To answer this accurately, we must first determine whether this case law was a temporary law governing only Mosaic Israel or a permanent legal statute for all Trinitarian covenantal societies.

F. Seed Laws and Land Laws

Seed laws and land laws were temporary statutes that applied only to Mosaic Israel.[22] I have argued previously that the seed laws of the Mosaic covenant were tied to Jacob's messianic prophecy regarding

21. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 678.

22. Appendix J.

Judah: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen. 49:10). Seed laws and land laws served as means of separating the tribes, thereby maintaining the continuity of each tribe until the fulfillment of Jacob's prophecy, which rested on tribal separation.[23] The jubilee inheritance laws were land laws that were designed by God to accomplish this task.

One aspect of tribal separation was the creation of a sense of unity and participation in a larger family unit. Members of each tribe were linked together as descendants of one of Jacob's sons. There was an aspect of brotherliness within a tribe that was not shared across the tribe's boundaries. There is a social distinction between brotherhood and otherhood. Boundaries mark this distinction. The main boundary for Israel was circumcision, but tribal boundaries also had their nationally separating and locally unifying effects.

By allowing the neighbor to pick mature fruit, the Mosaic law encouraged a sense of mutual solidarity. The local resident was entitled to reap the rewards of land and labor. The land belonged ultimately to God. It was a holy land, set apart by God for his historical purposes. To dwell in the land involved benefits and costs. One of the benefits was access to food, however temporary. The staff of life in effect was free. In harvest season, men in Israel would not die of starvation. But their source of sustenance was local: their neighbor's field. Would this have created animosity? Sometimes. Everything in a fallen world is capable of creating animosity. But what about the owner's sense of justice? It was his land, his effort, his time, and his seeds that had made this wealth possible. Why should another man have lawful access to the fruits of his labor?

One possible answer ties this law to the Promised Land. Israel was a holy land that had been set aside by God through a program of partial genocide. (God had specified total genocide, but the Israelites had failed.) The land was exclusively God's. It was His dwelling place. He fed His people on His land. God, not their own efforts, was the source of their wealth (Deut. 8:17).[24] Israel's holy status was still true in Jesus' day because of the temple and its sacrifices. But there is a problem with this explanation: strangers in Jesus' day dwelled in the land, and in fact ruled over the land. Furthermore, Jesus identified the Good Samaritan as a neighbor. The Samaritan therefore would

23. Appendix J.
24. Chapter 21.

have qualified as a man with lawful access to an Israelite's field. The Promised Land fails as the basis of this case law.

A second possible explanation is this: the tribes existed in order to complete God's plan for Israel. Local solidarity was important for maintaining the continuity of the tribes. Problem: this law was still in force in Jesus' day, yet the tribes no longer occupied the land as separate tribal units. The seed laws have nothing to do with this law.

Third, it could be argued that Israel was a holy army. An army does not operate in terms of the free market's principle of "high bid wins." In every military conflict in which a city is besieged, martial law replaces market contracts as the basis of feeding the population. The free market's principle of high bid wins is replaced by food rationing. Solidarity during wartime must not be undermined by a loss of morale. A nation's defenders are not all rich. *The closer we get to the priestly function of ensuring life, the less applicable market pricing becomes*. Problem: Israel was not a holy army after the exile. It was an occupied nation. Yet this case law was still in force. There was no discontinuity in this case between the Mosaic covenant and the post-exilic covenant.

If a Mosaic law was not a land law, a seed law, or a priestly law, then it was a cross-boundary law. This means that it remains in force in the New Covenant era. The problem is to identify in what ways this law can be applied in a relevant way in the New Covenant era.

G. The Farmer and the Grocer

The Mosaic law authorized a neighbor to pick grapes or grain from another man's field. It did not authorize a man to pick up a free piece of fruit from a grocer's table. What is the difference? What underlying moral or organizational principle enables us to distinguish between the two acts? In both cases, the "picker" wanted to eat a piece of fruit for free. He was not allowed to do this in the second case.

Let us consider the economic aspects of this law. Both the farmer and the grocer sought a positive return on their investments. The farmer planted seeds in the ground, nurtured the seedlings, and sold the crop to someone, possibly the grocer or his economic agent. The grocer made his money by purchasing a crop in bulk from the farmer or his economic agent, transporting it to a central location, and displaying it in a way pleasing to buyers. What was the differentiating factor? Time? Soil? Location? Money?

The difference seems to have been this: *control over rural land*. The farmer in Mosaic Israel worked the land. He cared for it directly. The

grocer did not. The farmer profited directly from the output of this land. The grocer profited indirectly. The farmer had a unique dependence on the land. The grocer did so only indirectly, insofar as food that was imported from abroad was much more expensive for him to buy, except in Mediterranean coastal areas and regions close to the borders of the nation. The distinction between grocers and land owners may also have had something to do with the jubilee land laws.[25] Rural land was governed by the jubilee law. Urban real estate was not. Unlike urban land, prior to the exile, rural land was the exclusive property of the heirs of the conquest, though not after the return (Ezek. 47:21–23).

Those who lived on the land and profited from it as farmers were required to share a portion of the land's productivity with others, as we have seen. To this extent, the fruit of the land was the inheritance of those who dwelled close by. This law would have strengthened the sense of community in a society that was bound by a national covenant that was tied to land. The local poor would have had something to eat in the harvest—a sense of participation in the blessings of God. A brief safety net was in place. To gain access to a full safety net—a lawful bag in which to put the picked produce—the poor had to work as gleaners (Deut. 24:19–22).[26] While the state was not authorized to send crop collectors into the fields to collect food to redistribute to the poor, the Mosaic civil law did not enforce sanctions against those who came into a field to eat a handful of food. *It was not legal for land owners to impose physical sanctions against neighbors who took advantage of this law*. The civil law did not compel wealth redistribution in Mosaic Israel, but it defined the land owner's property rights in such a way that the state was prohibited from bringing negative sanctions against those who entered the field to pick a handful of the crop.

H. A Shared Environment

Let us consider a difficult application of this case law. Did this law open every man's fields to wandering hordes during a famine? Times of famine have been times of great disruption of the social order. Wandering bands of hungry people fan out across the countryside. Whole populations move from region to region in search of food. This happened repeatedly in Europe from the late medieval era until

25. As I shall argue below, I do not think this was covenantally relevant: "Has This Law Been Annulled?"

26. Chapter 62.

the late seventeenth century, and well into the twentieth century in Russia.[27] Similar famines have occurred in China in modern times.[28] Before the advent of modern capitalism, famines were a regular occurrence. Even within capitalist society, Ireland suffered a nearly decade-long famine in the 1840s. The absentee landlords in England did not foresee the threat to the potato crop posed by the blight at its first appearance in 1841. Over the next decade, these landlords paid for their lack of foresight with huge capital losses; a million Irish paid with their lives.[29]

Are wandering strangers in search of food the judicial equivalent of a neighbor? Is a desperate family on the road in search of food entitled fill their stomachs with a farmer's corn or apples? If enough of these people were to show up at harvest time, their economic effect would be comparable to a swarm of locusts. Locusts in the Bible are seen as the judgment of God (Ex. 10:4–6; Deut. 28:38). The land owner planted a crop and cared for it in the expectation that his family would eat for another season. Was he now required to sit idly by and watch strangers consume his family's future? Was the state prohibited by this case law from defending his interests? If so, then what would be his incentive to go to the expense of planting and nurturing his next crop? Would he even survive to plant again? Was Israel's society benefited by opening the fields to all comers in every economic situation? Was the nation's future agricultural output threatened by a definition of "neighbor" that includes an open-ended number of strangers in search of free food?

The goal of this law was the preservation of community. Its context was *a local neighborhood in which families shared the same environment*. A crop failure for one family was probably accompanied by a crop failure for all. Mutual aid and comfort in times of adversity were likely in a community in which every person has a symbolic stake in the community's success. These people shared a common destiny. This law was an aspect of that common destiny.

As for the Samaritan in the parable, he was not on the road for the purpose of stripping fields along the way. The Samaritan assisted the beaten man; he did not eat the last grape on the man's vine. The Samaritan found another man on the same road. They were both on a

27. For a list of dozens of these famines, see Pitirim A. Sorokin, *Man and Society in Calamity* (New York: Dutton, 1942), p. 132.

28. Pearl S. Buck's novel, *The Good Earth* (1931), tells this story.

29. A good summary of the story is Christine Kinealy, *The Great Hunger in Ireland* (Chicago: Pluto, 1997).

journey. They shared a similar environment. They were both subject to the risks of travel. The threat of robbery threatened all men walking down that road. What had befallen the victim might have befallen the Samaritan. It might yet befall him. Perhaps the same band of robbers was still in the "neighborhood": the road to Jericho.

Men who share a common environment also share common risks. When men who share common risks are voluntarily bound by a shared ethical system to help each other in bad times, a kind of social insurance policy goes into effect. Risks are pooled. The costs that would otherwise befall a victim are reduced by men's willingness to defray part of each other's burdens. But, unlike an insurance policy, there is no formal agreement, nor does the victim have any legal claim on the non-victim. The beaten man had no legal claim on the Samaritan, the Levite, or the priest. Two of the three ignored him. They broke no civil law, but their act of deliberately passing by on the other side of the road revealed their lack of commitment to the principle of community: shared burdens and blessings.

The ethics of neighborliness is mutual sharing when the resources are available. The ethics of neighborliness did not mandate that the state remain inactive when hordes of men whose only goal is obtaining food sweep down on a rural community. The harvest was shared locally because men have struggled with the same obstacles to produce it. The original struggle was the conquest of Canaan, which was a tribal effort in each region. This law assumed a context of mutual obligations, not the asymmetric conditions in a famine, when the producers face an invasion from outside the community by those who did not share in the productive effort.

I. Community and Economy

One of the favorite contrasts of sociologists is community vs. economy. The most famous example of this in sociological literature is Ferdinand Tönnies' *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (1887), which he wrote at age 32. In this pioneering work, the author contrasted the small, medieval-type village with the modern city. He argued that the demise of the personal relationships of village life has led to the impersonal rationalism and calculation of the modern city.[30] He used the now-familiar analogies of organic life and mechanical structure to de-

30. He did not argue, as Marx and other sociologists and economists have argued, that it was the rise of capitalism that undermined the village life. Robert A. Nisbet, *The Sociological Tradition* (New York: Basic Books, 1966), p. 78.

scribe these two forms of human association.[31] He viewed the family as the model or ideal type of *Gemeinschaft*.[32] The business firm, which is a voluntary association established for a limited, rational purpose (profit), would seem to serve well as a model for *Gesellschaft*.[33]

In American history, there have been few defenders of *Gemeinschaft*. Thomas Jefferson heralded the independent yeoman farmer, but Jefferson was no advocate of village life. A group of intellectuals and poets known as the Nashville agrarians in 1930 wrote a brief defense of southern agrarian life in contrast to modern urbanism, but they have long been regarded at best as regional utopians, even in the South.[34] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels were contemptuous of "the idiocy of rural life,"[35] and most commentators have agreed with them. Most commentators have been urban.

The movement of vast populations from the farms to cities has been a continuing phenomenon worldwide, beginning no later than the Industrial Revolution in the late eighteenth century. The advancing division of labor was made possible by close contact in urban areas, the transportation revolution, the mechanization of agriculture, the revolution in electrical power, and government-funded road systems. This has concentrated populations in vast urban complexes.

The Bible promotes both cultures. The farms of Israel were held together as a civilization by the Ark of the Covenant, which was housed in a city. The New Heaven and New Earth is described as a city in which the tree of life grows (Rev. 22:2).[36] In the Old Covenant, the city was supported by the farms. In the New Covenant's imagery of the final state, the image is different: the city contains the tree. The tree feeds the inhabitants. The symbolism seems to be *from farm to city*. This was also the thrust of the jubilee legislation: ever-smaller farms for an ever-growing population.[37] Yet, covenantally, an heir of

31. Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community & Society (Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft)* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, [1887] 1957), pp. 33–37.

32. Nisbet, *Sociological Tradition*, p. 75.

33. His theme—the transition from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*, from communalism to rationalism—became an integrating theme in the works of the great German sociologist, Max Weber. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

34. *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (Baton Rouge: University of Louisiana Press, [1930] 1977). Cf. Alexander Karanikas, *Tillers of a Myth: Southern Agrarians as Social and Literary Critics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966).

35. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), in *Collected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1976), 6, p. 488.

36. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987), ch. 21.

37. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 24.

the conquest always had his historical roots in the land. The land was his inheritance. His name was associated with the land.

This judicial link to the soil ended with the New Covenant. The land ceased to be a holy place after the fall of Jerusalem. But the imagery of the tree of life, like the imagery of bread and wine, ties members of the New Covenant community to the soil. The preference of suburban Americans for carefully mowed lawns, of Englishmen and Japanese for gardens, of the Swiss and Austrians for flowers growing in window gardens and for vegetable gardens all testify to man's desire to retain his links to the soil from which he came.

There is a story told about the German free market economist Wilhelm Röpke. He was living in Geneva at the time. He invited another free market economist (said by some to be Ludwig von Mises) to his home near Geneva. He kept a vegetable garden plot near his home. The visitor remarked that this was an inefficient way to produce food. He countered that it was an efficient way to produce happiness.[38]

The division of labor is a powerful social arrangement. Specialization increases our economic output as individuals. We can earn more money per hour by specializing than by performing low division of labor tasks. But we also increase our dependence on the social institutions that have promoted the division of labor. Above all, we increase our reliance on banks, transportation systems, and other arrangements run by computers. We have delivered our lives into the hands and minds of computer programmers. The payments system is governed by fractional reserve banking. This is risky. There is an economic case for investing in a lower division of labor lifestyle with a portion of our assets and our time.

There is more to community than efficiency. Community is more than property rights. Community in Mosaic Israel was based on a series of covenants. The right of private property was defended by the commandment not to steal, but the definition of theft did not include eating from a neighbor's unharvested crop. This exception was unique to the land. It applied to a form of property that was not part of the free market system of buying and selling (Lev. 25). God was the owner of the land in Mosaic Israel. He set unique requirements for ownership of Mosaic Israel's rural land. These rules were designed

38. Russell Kirk said that Röpke said that it was Mises. In 1975, I heard the same story from another economist, Röpke's translator, Patrick Boarman. I do not recall that Mises was the target of the remark, but he may have been. See Kirk's 1992 Foreword to Wilhelm Roepke, *The Social Crisis of Our Time* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction, [1942] 1992), p. ix.

to provide a brief safety net in an area of the economy in which it was illegal to transfer family ownership down through the generations.

In the final analysis, this law was far more symbolic than economic, for the harvest time would not have lasted very long. The sense of community had to be preserved in a system that restricted buying and selling. Those who did not own the best land or even any land at all had a stake in the success of local land owners, despite the law's restrictions of the permanent sale of inherited property. This symbol of participation in the fruits of the land was important for a society whose members celebrated the fulfillment of God's prophecy regarding the inheritance of a Promised Land.

J. Has This Law Been Annulled?

Is there any Mosaic covenantal principle whose annulment also annulled this law? We know that a similar law is still in force. Paul cited the law prohibiting the muzzling of the working ox, applying it to the payment of ministers. "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward" (I Tim. 5:17–18).[39] But this case law applied more generally to the Christian walk. "For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope" (I Cor. 9:9–10).[40] There is a down payment in history—an earnest—of the covenant- keeper's kingdom victory in eternity. This down payment is an aspect of the inheritance (Eph. 1:10–14).

The tribal system was annulled in A.D. 70. Was this law exclusively tribal? The same kinds of psychological benefits seem to apply outside the tribal context: commitment to the community, a sense of participation in the blessings of this community, a willingness to defend it against invaders. What is missing today is Mosaic Israel's public exclusion of the names of other gods. A man's presence in the land does not, in and of itself, testify publicly to his willingness to serve

39. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 7.

40. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 11.

under the law of God. The mobility of rival gods is like the mobility of the God of the Bible in the Old Covenant. The universality of their claims makes them different from the gods of the ancient Near East in Moses' day. To this extent, the situation has changed. But religions that claimed allegiance to universal gods appeared in the Near East and Far East at about the time of the Babylonian exile. Nevertheless, people in Israel in Jesus' day were still allowed to pick grain in their neighbors' fields.

This law seems to be a cross-boundary law. The neighbor, defined biblically, has a legal claim to a handful of any crop that he can pick. The biblical hermeneutical principle is that any Old Covenant law not annulled explicitly or implicitly by a New Covenant law is still valid. There seems to be no principle of judicial discontinuity that would annul this law.[41]

Conclusion

Jesus' answer to the Pharisees pointed to the sabbath principle as a means of liberating men. The disciples were hungry. Food was nearby. They could lawfully pick grain, but they did not cook it. They had to do some minimal work, but any food preparation activity is work. They were not violating the sabbath. They were walking and talking with the Lord of the sabbath. This was the top priority of the disciples.

The sabbath is not to be used as a means of interfering with recreation that leads to better knowledge of God's work. A stroll on the day of rest is legitimate. So is discussion of spiritual matters. So is food preparation that does not disrupt the day's pattern of rest. Man is not to become enmeshed in a formidable array of rules governing the day of rest. Men are to be liberated by the day of rest. They are not to be placed in such bondage that they cannot enjoy the day. The sabbath is liberation from work and liberation from fear. It is not to be turned a means of subjugation by means of a handbook of man-made restrictions.[42]

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41. Because I see no judicial discontinuity between the covenants regarding this law, I conclude that the distinction between the grocer and the farmer was not based on the jubilee law, which has been annulled (Luke 4:18–22). North, *Treasure and Dominion*, ch. 6.

42. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 34.

5

THE DECEITFULNESS OF RICHES[1]

> *And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word, And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.*
>
> MARK 4:18–19

The theocentric principle undergirding this passage was sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.[2].

A. Strong Delusion

In this parable of the seeds, we are told that the fruitfulness of the soil determines the result of the sowing. The seed-sower—God—distributes the same seeds, but the results are different. This passage seems to minimize the work of the sower. But verse 19 provides a clue: "the deceitfulness of riches." The same Greek root word for deceitfulness is found in another passage that deals with Satan's work of deception.

> For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all **deceivableness** of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should

1. Adapted from Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

> believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness (II Thess. 2:7–12).

Here, we learn that God sends a strong delusion on those whom He hates in order that they might believe a lie. It is the same with the soils. God is sovereign in salvation, both as seed-sower and soil-maker.

B. Wealth and Autonomy

This passage is an explanation of the previous passage:

> And he taught them many things by parables, and said unto them in his doctrine, Hearken; Behold, there went out a sower to sow: And it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the way side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up. And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth: But when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit. And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred. And he said unto them, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear (Mark 4:2–9).

Riches are here compared with thorns. The cares of this world and riches overwhelm a man's faith in the word of God. This points back to the curse on Adam: "Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field" (Gen. 3:18).[3] The thorns are hindrances that thwart man's work. The work in question in the parable is the work of extending the kingdom of God in history. The measure of earthly success is wealth, yet wealth is what threatens the hearer's work. The cares of the world undermine his kingdom-building efforts. One such care is the amassing and care of riches. Great wealth requires great care to maintain it.

Riches are said to deceive men. What is it about riches that deceives men? Moses made this clear: *the sin of autonomy*. "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth" (Deut. 8:17).[4] The author of Proverbs wrote: "The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit" (Prov. 18:11).[5] "Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither

3. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 12.

4. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 21.

5. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas,

poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain" (Prov. 30:8–9).[6]

What is it about wealth that persuades men that they are autonomous? One aspect is the great *range of alternatives* open to men with wealth. In fact, wealth is best described in terms of this range of alternatives. We say that a person's wealth has increased in direct proportion to the increase over his previous range of choices. The man of great wealth is tempted to trust in his wealth because it seems to endow him with him a Godlike power of decision-making. This is a delusion. The range of choices open to any man is minuscule compared to what God can do. God is infinite; He can do whatever He chooses. The rich man is blinded by his wealth because it is his preferred means of comparison with other men, not with God.

Another aspect is the *seeming impersonalism* of wealth. Wealth is a tool of dominion. Tools appear to be impersonal. They are not, but they appear to be. Wealth extends a man's power and influence over others in a seemingly impersonal way. A tool is usually regarded as impersonal device that extends the personal decisions of its owner. *Wealth is seen as existing independently, or only as an extension of the owner*. This is a delusion. Wealth does not exist independent of the decisions of other men. Other men *impute economic value* to the rich man's capital or to the services that he sells that provide him with his wealth. If their opinions change, he can be reduced to poverty. The familiar example of the buggy whip industry is analytically correct. When the automobile came, the buggy whip business was doomed, except among the Amish.

Men seek those forms of wealth that insulate them from the changing opinions of other men. They accumulate money because money is more constant in value than the opinions of their customers. It is the most marketable commodity. We are now back to the issue of the wide range of choice. But when an invading army comes, or plague comes, or famine comes, or some other disaster comes, money is of little or no value. The environment that made wealth what it was has changed. So, people's imputation of value has changed.

To attribute to any aspect of the creation a power associated with God is to move from theonomy to autonomy. Men are tempted to attribute to wealth or power this kind of autonomy. But most men

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Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 54.

6. *Ibid*., ch. 85.

recognize the inherent danger of power. It calls forth others who wish to claim such power by whatever means. Power is too personal to be shared easily; it must either be monopolized or surrendered.[7] But wealth can be gained in many ways. Others can become wealthy without threatening the status of the wealthy man.[8] So, wealth is the more common means adopted in the quest for autonomy.

The issue of autonomy vs. theonomy is the issue of trust. Who do we trust? God or nature? God or ourselves? God or money? *The issue of trust is ultimately the issue of worship*. We subordinate ourselves to that which we trust.

C. Riches vs. Fruitfulness

The deceitfulness of riches leads to unfruitfulness. This is because men are tempted to focus on the temporal. Riches are a convenient means of assessing productivity. Because of the dominion covenant (Gen. 1:26–28),[9] men are inescapably confronted with the results of their own productivity in their God-assigned task of subduing the earth. They seek to discover *agreed-upon success indicators* that will reveal their degree of success. In almost every society, money has been the most familiar success indicator, the one open to the widest audience. Unlike beauty or power or artistic creativity, wealth is open to a wide range of talents. In this sense, it is a more impersonal success indicator.

Because so many people acknowledge wealth as a measure of success, men are lured into pursuing it. Other men impute value to wealth as the measure of a man's life. It is easy to listen to the crowd and to evaluate one's own performance in relation to the economic success of others.

This is a snare and a delusion, Jesus taught. The crowd is wrong. What constitutes riches is *right standing with God*. "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is eas-

7. In bureaucracy, power is divided up more finely and made less dependent on anyone's personal attributes. Bureaucratic power can be allocated widely. But it is circumscribed by rules. Bureaucracy is the common man's way to power.

8. If many people become wealthy, this can threaten his status. Some goods are *positional* goods. They are valuable only because they are in short supply. If mass production makes them widely available, they lose their status-giving power. Fred Hirsch, *Social Limits to Growth* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), ch. 3. This is one reason why free market capitalism is hated by members of groups that have attained their social status in a pre-capitalistic economy, where wealth is not widely shared.

9. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, chaps, 3, 4.

ier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:23–26).[10]

Then what is fruitfulness? "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law" (Gal. 5:22–23). Money does not buy these or empower these. The deceitfulness of wealth wars against these. Wealth is not inherently opposed to them, but the deceitfulness associated with it does undermine such fruitfulness.

The success indicators of spiritual maturity are not quantifiable. Wealth is. The lack of a quantifiable success indicator bothers most men. They want to "keep score" in life. They seek a numerical indicator. "He who dies with the most toys, wins" proclaims a popular American tee-shirt.

Did Jesus warn men not to use wealth as their success indicator, except perhaps as a negative indicator? If He did, then He broke with the Mosaic law's covenantal principle of inheritance. There is no doubt that wealth was a legitimate success indicator under the Mosaic law. "The LORD shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee" (Deut. 28:8).[11] Wealth was a success indicator even before the Mosaic law. "And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold" (Gen. 13:2). The loss of wealth was seen as a curse. "Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways" (Hag. 1:6–7).[12] Consider your ways, God told them. The disparity between their input (sown much) and their output (bring in little) was a lack-of-success indicator. It was to motivate them to spiritual introspection. There was a positive relationship between covenantal faithfulness and economic success. Did Jesus deny this relationship? If He did, then the New Covenant represents a sharp discontinuity with the Old Covenant, for the visible sanctions have changed.

10. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 38.

11. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 69.

12. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 31.

E. Exchange Rate: Temporal Wealth vs. Eternal Wealth

The text does not say that riches lead men astray; their deception does. Man is easily deceived by riches, as we have seen. Riches are temporal; so, they focus man's attention on the temporal. The *time-bound nature of riches* is a snare and a delusion. Jesus kept teaching about the exchange rate between temporal wealth and eternal wealth. He kept saying that the rate of exchange is low, but men—especially rich men—think it is high. Why lay up treasure on earth, Jesus asked, where thieves break in? Is this not foolish? But the rich man cannot see the foolishness. Why? Because he refuses to see that *he is as temporal as his wealth*. They both dissipate—he more certainly than his wealth. But he turns a blind eye to his mortality. Even an old man thinks he has at least five years left to live.

1. Declining Marginal Utility and Addiction

Economics teaches that as a person accumulates units of one asset, each additional unit is worth less to him than the previous unit. This is the law of decreasing marginal utility. It leads to the statement, "enough is enough." So, a rich man should be progressively willing to surrender ownership of a unit of this asset to gain a unit of an asset that he does not own: eternal wealth. But there is an assumption behind the law of diminishing marginal utility: the person's tastes do not change. If there is an addictive aspect of the item, then the law of diminishing marginal utility applies differently. The enjoyment produced by each unit declines, as economic theory says it must, but demand nevertheless increases. To get the same thrill as before, the user must consume more of the drug per dose. To avoid painful withdrawal symptoms, the addict must consume more doses per unit of time. Jesus' description of the deceitfulness of riches and the inability of the rich man to enter heaven implies that *temporal wealth is addictive*.

If temporal wealth were not addictive, then, in the eyes of a rich man, the exchange rate between temporal wealth and eternal wealth would shift in favor of eternal wealth. As a man accumulates more temporal wealth, he should find the value of each additional unit worth less to him. Eternal wealth would look more appealing to him. He would be willing to exchange some of his earthly wealth for a greater supply of eternal wealth. But this is rarely the case, Jesus taught. This points to earthly wealth as addictive.

Yet the same can be true of the accumulation of eternal wealth. It, too, can become addictive, but not for many people. Still, the idea

has had a fascination for Americans. In 1933, in the worst economic phase of the Great Depression, a 1929 novel by Rev. Lloyd C. Douglas became a best-seller: *Magnificent Obsession*. The title reveals the theme: giving away wealth for God's kingdom becomes an obsession. As a few men learn this lifelong discipline, they prosper. The book was made into a popular movie in 1935 and again in 1954.[13] But most people find the suggestion hard to implement, especially rich men.

2. Radical Change

There is another explanation for the rich man's resistance: the non-marginal nature of the exchange. Eternal life is not sold for temporal wealth, unit by unit. It is given away as a package deal through special grace: *definitive sanctification*. This package is supposed to be filled over time by *progressive sanctification*.[14] Marginal exchange is the meaning of this verse: "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal" (Matt. 6:20).[15] Laying up treasures is not a one-time event. It is *a lifetime process of exchange*, unit by unit, good work by good work. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:8–10). These exchanges begin only after legal access to the eternal treasury is transferred to the recipient.

Prior to receiving grace, the poor man is more likely than the rich man to think, "If this life is all there is, then I will consider eternal life." The rich man thinks, "This life is good for me. I cannot be sure about eternal life. If I must sacrifice this life for that life, I shall stick with what I know and have come to depend on." *Riches focus a rich man's attention and hope on the temporal, where he is successful*. He will not readily believe that portions of his temporal wealth can be ex-

13. Douglas was a theological liberal. He was the minister of the large and influential First Congregational Church of Los Angeles in the late 1920s. He wrote the book in an emotional depression, when the church's leaders were discussing his dismissal. He resigned, finished the book, then wrote a dozen more, several of which became best-sellers and movies. His most famous novel was *The Robe* (1942), which became the first movie in Cinemascope (1953), the wide-screen technology.

14. John Murray, "Sanctification," *The Collected Works of John Murray*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), II, p. 277. Cf. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First* Timothy, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 10:A:2.

15. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 13.

changed for eternal wealth. If he does believe this prior to special grace, he is deceived once again: works religion. He cannot open an account at heaven's treasury on his own signature. Regeneration is the radical change that must precede the exchange process.

The price of radical change is lower for the poor man. He is not giving up much. *The price of radical change is higher for the rich man. He surrenders much: his would-be autonomy*. Radical decisions are rare. Most decisions are made at the margin: surrendering a little of this to get a little of that.

Jesus indicates here that the required change is radical: surrendering faith in this world's ability to offer eternal bliss. You cannot buy your way into eternal life. So, it is not the fact that a rich man is asked to give up his wealth that alienates him. He is asked only to tithe, just as the poor man is asked. But he *is* asked to surrender faith in his riches as a gateway to eternity. This is the great stumbling block of the gospel for the rich man: *he cannot buy his way in*. It is not much of a stumbling block to the poor man, unless he is poor because of some addictive sin. The rich man is asked to see his riches as God's gift, which God may remove at any time, just as He removed Job's wealth. Job proclaimed, in the midst of his new-found poverty, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21).[16] The rich man is asked to proclaim this testimony in the midst of his treasure. Few do. They trust in their treasure.

Men generally see their success as well-deserved.[17] They see any set-backs as deviations from justice. The poor man who comes to grips emotionally with his poverty can look forward to a better world after death. He is told by God that his poverty is part of God's plan for him in this world. His poverty is no longer a curse or an injustice; it is merely an environment—even a predestined environment. He can mentally surrender faith in this world. But the rich man will not readily see his wealth as merely as a God-imposed environment. He sees his wealth as his legitimate reward for his own meritorious behavior, or at least his shrewd behavior. He is asked by God to turn loose of his positive, autonomous self-image, which is the product of the deceitfulness of riches. He refuses. His wealth reinforces—validates—his positive self-image. The gospel unquestionably removes

16. Gary North, *Predictability and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Job* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 2.

17. When they do not, they may be eaten up with guilt.

this validation. He sees his wealth as a kingdom-building tool for his little kingdom. God says that his wealth is a kingdom-building tool for God's kingdom. The rich man sees his wealth as his tool. God says that both he and his wealth are God's tools. For a believer in autonomy, this is a bitter pill.

E. Inheritance

The issue of wealth is the issue of inheritance. Jesus told a parable of a rich man who dreamed of building new barns. "And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:16–21).[18] His dream of new barns was legitimate. Grain must be stored. What was illegitimate was his thought that the barns would be his. He did not recognize his own mortality. He did not think about inheritance. He did not ask himself the question: "Whose shall those assets be?"

"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5). Those who are meek before God will inherit.[19] The rich man is deceived into believing that the might of his hand has gotten him his wealth. This was as true under the Mosaic Covenant as under the New Covenant. Jesus warned them that the success indicator of expanding wealth is not a legitimate substitute for being rich toward God.

But how can a person be rich toward God? Through worship. This was Haggai's warning to Israel. They had not built God's house of worship. "Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD. Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and

18. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 25.

19. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 4.

the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands" (Hag. 1:8–11).[20]

The open purse will be filled. The closed purse will be emptied. The open purse is open at the top, where its owner can reach in and pull out money to give at his discretion. The closed purse has a hole in the bottom. Its owner has no discretion as to what happens to the contents. *The authority of a man over a full purse is based on his submission to God*. This was as true in Haggai's day as in Christ's.

The inheritance that Christ spoke of is the whole earth. What greater accumulation of wealth could there be? It is accumulated by His people. How? By their wisdom, faithfulness, and generosity. By their efficiency, too. *Honest wealth is the result of serving others, namely, customers*. He who does not waste resources can serve customers better. Over time, this wealth builds up as His people extend the kingdom of God in history. This is the fulfillment of the dominion covenant.

Christ was warning His followers not to make the same mistake that those of Haggai's generation made: *the mistake of the tight purse*. We are to be rich toward God. This is the basis of wealth accumulation under the New Covenant, just as it was under the Old. There is no discontinuity. The sanctions are the same. The law is the same. The sin is the same: autonomy.

Conclusion

The deceitfulness of riches chokes the word. So do other lusts. What word? The word of God. The lusts that riches can temporarily fulfill blind men to the word of God.

The top priority here is to deal with riches in such a way as to avoid the great deception: autonomy. This was what Moses warned Israel; this is what Jesus also warned Israel. This warning is universal. Riches are either a covenantal blessing or a prelude to a covenantal curse. The man who dreamed of building barns was under a curse. He was a fool. He was building them for himself. He forgot about his own mortality. Mortals cannot enjoy the experience of wealth accumulation indefinitely. Either their time runs out or their wealth does. Jesus warned every rich man of the deception of riches,

20. North, *Restoration and Dominion*, ch. 32.

which validates the rich man's autonomy: *the presumption of immortality and autonomy*. The rich man's wealth makes him feel autonomous and therefore divine. But men die, unlike God. The man with the barn-building plans forgot this.

To be rich with God is not to dissipate one's wealth. It is to sew up the hole in the bottom of one's purse. Accounts receivable continue to exceed accounts paid. To be rich with God is also to accumulate wealth in the world beyond the grave. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal" (Matt. 6:19–20).[21] This investment program restores the lost continuity that individual mortality imposes. We inherit beyond the grave. By giving up the lust for autonomy in history, we can become our own heirs in eternity. We leave an inheritance behind, yet we immediately collect it in heaven. We can have our cake and eat it, too. He who succumbs to the deceitfulness of riches either consumes his cake before he dies or leaves it behind for others to enjoy. In either case, he is left without cake.

Few men believe this. Of those who say they believe it, few consistently act in terms of it. Men must trust God to deliver them from evil in history, and to provide their daily bread. But to believe that treasure is accumulated in eternity, based on the surrender of wealth in history, requires enormous trust in Jesus' teachings. It is easier for a poor man to believe it than a rich man. The poor man does not trust his wealth. A rich man does.

Rich men trust in their wealth. They do not have correct answers for these questions.

In what does permanent wealth consist?

Where is it accumulated?

When is it accumulated?

How is it accumulated?

When is it inherited?

Where is it inherited?

The content of a person's faith—his trust—is revealed by his answers to these questions.

21. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 13.

6

THE RICH GET RICHER; SO DO THE POOR[1]

> *And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given. For he that hath, to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath.*
>
> MARK 4:24–25

The theocentric principle of this passage was God's absolute sovereignty in granting the gift of salvation to those whom He favors, and to remove everything from everyone else. This is the issue of sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.[2]This is not something that covenant-breaking man wants to hear. In fact, it is not something that most covenant-keeping men want to hear. It implies that God is absolutely sovereign in His distribution of the gift of salvation. He sends His people out to preach the gospel, but He clogs the ears of all those listeners whom He eternally opposes.

The parallel passage in Matthew reads:

> And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand (Matt. 13:10–13).

1. Adapted from Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 27.

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

A. The Kingdom of God

The issue is the gospel of the kingdom. Who would receive it? Not those whom God opposed, Jesus said. Who might that have been? The context made it clear: the Jews. Then who was favored by God? Years later, Paul answered: the gentiles. The word of the Lord has come to them, Paul wrote, and they have responded in faith. Not so with Israel. Israel heard, yet she did not hear—exactly as Jesus said. Paul wrote:

> For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world. But I say, Did not Israel know? First Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you. But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me. But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people (Rom. 10:11–21).

Paul here cited Isaiah: "Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed" (Isa. 6:10). So did Jesus in this passage: "And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear" (Matt. 13:14–16).

Israel desperately needed salvation. Their ears had grown dull; their heart had waxed gross. Nevertheless, Jesus spoke in parables so that the majority of His listeners would not understand His offer of salvation. He did not seek to sharpen the hearing of all who listened

to Him. His words in this passage are inescapably clear: His offer of the gospel was presented in such a way that Israel would *not* hear and respond in faith. Calvinists understand this passage and accept it. Anti-Calvinists prefer not to discuss it, and when commenting on it, they have great difficulties. They have the same difficulties with Paul's similar words in the Book of Acts:

> And when they [the Jews] had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening. And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not. And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it (Acts 28:23–28).

B. He Who Has, Gets

The Jews had the law and the prophets. This was something of great value. The gentiles did not. Yet the Jews were about to be passed over by God. The gentiles were not. This seems to imply that he who has, loses; he who has nothing, gets. "He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt. 10:39).[3] Yet this passage states the reverse: "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that [which] he hath." How should we understand this?

Consider Jesus' interaction with the Pharisees regarding social outcasts. "And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matt. 9:11–13). The implication here is that all men are sick unto death. Some men recognize this;

3. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 24.

others do not. Those who acknowledge that they are sick will seek the services of a physician. Those who do not, won't.

What did Israel possess? Not good spiritual health, surely. What Israel possessed was *the means of diagnosis*: the law and the prophets, which testified to the spiritual sickness of mankind. Jeremiah warned: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9). Isaiah warned: "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities" (Isa. 64:6–7). The Pharisees knew these ancient warnings, but they did not perceive that the warnings applied to them. Israel had the kingdom of God, but it was about to be taken away from them: "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43).

What was the deciding factor in maintaining the kingdom grant? Good fruit. Jesus earlier had said: "Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit. O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matt. 12:33–37). He had called for ethical consistency. He had called men to live out their confessions of faith. He wanted them to see exactly what they are from God's point of view. He called for *ethical self-consciousness*.

It is not the mere possession of God's law that can secure salvation. Men must obey it. But they do not obey it. Thus, they are in need of a savior, a kinsman-redeemer. The gentiles recognized this need; the Jews did not. The Jews had known of the coming savior (Isa. 53), but this did them no good. The gentiles had not known, but they would soon recognize Him when His disciples brought word of His redemptive work on their behalf.

What was it that the gentiles possessed? *The knowledge of their own covenantally bankrupt status before God*. This knowledge would soon

bring them the kingdom grant: incorporation into the church. What did the Jews lack? This same knowledge. They would soon be disinherited: excluded from this incorporation. He who had nothing, gained; he who had something, lost.

This passage deals prophetically with men's respective positions after the inheritance had been transferred. The kingdom of God would go to the gentiles, Jesus later warned the Pharisees. Then the traditional covenantal system of rewards and curses would prevail: those who have will receive. Those who have nothing will lose even that which they had possessed.

If I have nothing, how can I lose it? This initially makes no sense. But it makes sense within the context of Old Covenant Israel. The Jews had something valuable: the Mosaic law. Paul wrote: "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful. For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin" (Rom. 7:12–14). To ignore the law's testimony is to risk losing everything, Paul warned. The Mosaic law tells us that we have nothing of value to bring before God. Conclusion: "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). James agreed: "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10). This was the fate of Old Covenant Israel: possessing something valuable, the law of God, Israel had nothing except the law's condemnation. Having nothing, i.e., a having *a false hope in salvation by law*, Israel soon had the kingdom taken away. The gentiles, not having received the Mosaic law, having only the work of the law written on every person's heart (Rom. 2:15),[4] accepted the gospel's message of redemption. The gentiles received something: redemption.

From this point on, the covenantal system of historical sanctions goes into operation: he who has, gets. God's grace pours down visibly on those who have already received the grace of redemption. "But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deut. 8:18).[5] The covenant's

4. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 4.

5. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*

blessings reinforce men's faith in the covenant. As a result, they exercise greater faith. The process of linear economic growth begins.

C. A Thing of Value

We learn in this passage that he who has nothing nevertheless will eventually receive great gain. How can this be? We find the same seeming anomaly in Proverbs. "There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing: there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches" (Prov. 13:7).[6] The man who attains great tangible wealth, but nothing else, possesses nothing of value in God's eyes. The man who makes himself poor in the world's things for God's sake thereby gains something of great value in God's eyes. He who gives up the pursuit of the world's treasure for the sake of God's eternal treasure has made a wise exchange. He who fills his life with things that deflect him from service to God has made an unwise exchange. "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul" (Mark 8:36–37)?[7]

The "nothing" that the rich man possesses is the thing that he shall lose: treasure. His tangible wealth has no exchange value in the marketplace of souls. If he loses his soul, he loses his tangible wealth, too. This is how a man with nothing can lose that which he has. He has nothing of value in God's eyes: no marketable capital. God then condemns him to hell because he possesses nothing of eternal value. Eternal life is obtained in this life or not at all. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36).

But what of the man to whom something of eternal value has been given by God? On the basis of this gift, he will eventually possess greater abundance. More than this: the tangible wealth of the one who has nothing of eternal value is transferred to the man who has received something of eternal value. This wealth transfer is also taught in Proverbs. "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13:22).[8] The man who seeks great tangible wealth at the cost of God's kingdom may achieve it, but over time, his accumulated wealth will

(Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 22.

6. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 39.

7. Chapter 11.

8. North, *Wisdom and Dominion*, ch. 41.

flow to covenant-keepers. The process of spiritual gains and losses is eventually reflected in the realm of economics.

This passage indicates that God's people will inherit the earth in history. The tangible wealth of covenant-breakers will eventually be transferred to covenant-keepers. This may be by the conversion of covenant-breakers: God's dispossession of Satan in history.

D. Regression Toward the Mean

There is an old saying, "The rich get richer, and the poor get poorer." As it applies to things of the spirit, this is an accurate summary. It corresponds to what Jesus taught in this passage. But does it also apply to economics? If it does, then this process somehow overcomes the statistical phenomenon known as regression toward the mean.

Free market economic theory teaches that if an entrepreneur discovers a new way to generate an above-market rate of return, other entrepreneurs will seek to discover his secret. Profitable information is bought and sold and stolen. Over time, new profit-producing techniques spread across the economy. As they do, their rate of return decreases, as more producers adopt the once-secret technique. This is why above-market rates of return tend to disappear. The economist calls this the unhampered free market's *tendency toward equilibrium*. Few concepts are more important than this one in modern economics.

There is an anomaly, however—one that is almost never discussed: the highly unequal distribution of income. My failure to recognize this in Chapter 68 of *Inheritance and Dominion* (1999) was an error. I wrote: "There is a bell-shaped distribution of wealth within a society because of the predictable outcomes of increased temptations that occur on the far ends of capital's spectrum." But there is no bell-shaped curve for either income or wealth. I had not recognized the continuing relevance of Vilfredo Pareto's discovery. This is why in the 2012 revision, I removed this section from the book. I discuss Pareto's law in the revised Chapter 69.[9]

1. Pareto's 20-80 Rule

The Bible's recommended goal is middle-class wealth. Jesus said, "For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always" (John 12:8). This statement appears in three of the Gospels (Matt.

9. This following subsection and the one that follows ("Moral Capital") are reprinted from Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), Introduction.

26:11; Mark 14:7), but not Luke's. If we will always have the poor with us, then we will always have the rich. The question is: What percentage of rich people will we have? Even more important, how much tangible wealth will the rich control? The answer is, most of it.

The shape of either a nation's wealth distribution curve or its income distribution curve does not resemble the shape of its population curve. The population curve bulges with the middle class. Both the income distribution curve and the wealth distribution curve bulge with the rich, generation after generation. This does not mean that the same families stay rich. It does mean that the richest 20% of the population own most of the wealth and gain most of the income at any given time. The shape of the income distribution curve resists alteration, generation after generation.

Italian sociologist-economist Vilfredo Pareto in the late nineteenth century made detailed investigations of the distribution of income in Europe. He discovered an amazing fact: the slope of the income curve, from the richest to the poorest members of society, was similar in every nation that he studied. The richest members gained most of the nation's income. This statistical relationship, first published in 1897,[10] has not changed over the last century, irrespective of the economic policies of individual industrial nations. Later studies by other economic historians indicated that in 1835–40, 1883, and 1919 in Great Britain, the top 10% earned 50% of the nation's income.[11] This statistical relationship has come to be known as the Pareto Law or the Pareto Rule, although Pareto did not ascribe a law's degree of predictability to it, at least not in his later work. A 20-80 distribution has been found to apply in social institution after institution, as well as in their diverse operations.[12] No one seems to know why. An economist wrote in 1965: "For a very long time, the Pareto law has lumbered the economic scene like an erratic block on the landscape; an empirical law which nobody can explain."[13]

A 1998 study by the Centre for the Study of Living Standards in Ottawa, Canada, reveals that the 20-80 rule still applies quite well

10. Vilfredo Pareto, *Cours d' Econonomie Politique*, vol. 2 (1897), pp. 370–72. The book has still not been translated into English, although it remains famous.

11. D. H. Macgregor, "Pareto's Law," *Economic Journal* (March 1936), pp. 81, 86. Reprinted in Mark Blaug (ed.), *Vilfredo Pareto* (1848–1923) (Brookfield, Vermont: Edward Elgar, 1992), pp. 21, 26.

12. Richard Koch, *The 80-20 Principle: How to Achieve More With Less* (Garden City, New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell, 1998).

13. Josef Steindl, *Random Processes and the Growth of Firms: A Study of the Pareto Law* (London: Charles Griffin, 1965), p. 18. Cited in *ibid*., p. 3.

in the United States. The top 20% of the population owned 81% of household wealth in 1962, 81.3% in 1983, 83.5% in 1989, 83.7% in 1995, and 84.3% in 1997. For the top 1%, the figures are as follows: 1962: 33.4%; 1983: 33.8%; 1989: 37.4%; 1995: 37.6%; 1997: 39.1%.[14] The changes have been in the direction of greater concentration of tangible wealth in the United States.

This seems impossible. Don't middle-class people own their homes? No; they reside in them, but they borrow to buy them. They pay mortgages. The rich are the holders of these mortgages. Title is passed to the home owner, but the asset has a debt against it. Most middle-class people own very little debt-free marketable wealth. They use debt to buy depreciating assets: consumer goods. They do not save. The rich use their money to buy appreciating assets and income-producing assets. They save a much higher percentage of their wealth. When the rich in one nation cease to save at high rates, the rich in another nation will replace them.

There is no known way for any industrial society to alter significantly the share of tangible wealth owned by the rich. When political force has been applied in the form of tax policy, the percentages have stayed pretty much the same. It is not even clear that there will be different wealth holders after the new taxation policies are in force, unless the existing wealth owners are deliberately expropriated or executed, as they were in Communist nations. Finally, there is no legitimate biblical justification for using the monopolistic force of civil government to redistribute private wealth in order to achieve greater equality.

The key economic issue regarding wealth distribution is this: the lawful means for gaining control over tangible capital. How do producers gain their share of national wealth in a particular nation? By power, by bribery, by political skills, or by satisfying customer demand? To benefit the largest number of people in society, civil governments should establish legal guarantees to all owners of property. This will encourage the self-interested rich to continue to use their wealth for customer-satisfying purposes. The rich should continue to save, invest, and provide tools for their employees. The legal protection of all people's right to own and use property will also encourage the bottom 80% to do the same. Through competition to satisfy customers, members in lower-income groups will replace those

14. John Schmitt, Lawrence Mishel, and Jared Bernstein, paper prepared for a panel on "Economic Well-being in North America," Canadian Economic Association Meetings, May 31, 1998, Table 7.

in the higher-income groups. The percentage of tangible capital in each quintile will not change very much, but the amount of wealth produced by this capital will increase dramatically over time, as the compound growth process takes over.

Capital accumulation by the rich is the most important measurable source of a capitalist society's increasing tangible wealth. The rich provide the money that buys the tools that raise the wealth of the other classes. But tools are not enough to make a society rich among nations. A society's other classes must possess *moral capital*, such as the willingness to work hard, future-orientation, honesty, and a good reputation. Moral capital is intangible, but it is nonetheless real. It produces income for its owners.

Pareto's anomaly is a real one. If 10% of the population receives half of the national income, or if 20% of the population receives 70 or 80 percent, and this continues generation after generation in nation after nation, where is the evidence of equilibrium? Why shouldn't the distribution curves of both income and wealth be more continuous? Why should they be permanently skewed to the right? If there is open entry into the capital markets for the bottom 80% of the population, why shouldn't wealth be more evenly distributed? Is there some psychological barrier to entry, such as a widespread fear of losing investment capital or the fear of becoming self-employed, that keeps the distribution curves skewed?

There is continuous movement into and out of the top 20%. The story of rags to riches to rags in three generations is a familiar one. Some very wealthy families do seem to maintain their presence over several generations. This may be due to political favoritism, i.e., restrictions on competition. It is hard to say. Detailed academic studies of permanent intergenerational wealth at the top are not common.[15] But there appears to be considerable mobility into and out of the top quintile for most of its members. But there is not mobility of the distribution curve itself.

2. Moral Capital

If we consider moral capital as income-producing capital, then the Pareto rule does not apply. There is only so much moral capital that

15. In the United States, Ferdinand Lundberg wrote several books on this topic, but he was always considered a maverick historian by academic historians. His books are not cited by historians very often, especially *The Rich and the Super-Rich: Who Really Owns America? How Do They Keep Their Wealth and Their Power?* (New York: Lyle Stewart, 1968).

any person can possess. The rich cannot amass moral capital in the way they can amass tangible capital. If the members of all economic classes in a society were to have approximately the same moral standards and degree of adherence to them, then the shape of the curve of society's moral capital would match the shape of the population curve.

Let me clarify my argument by an example. Assume that in nation A, only the rich are literate. This means that the national rate of illiteracy is 80%. In nation B, there is almost universal literacy. Without knowing anything else about the tangible wealth of either nation, which one would you guess has the richest rich people? I am speaking only of the top 20% of the population. I would guess nation B. But what if I am wrong? What if nation A is richer, perhaps because it is a small, oligarchical, oil-exporting nation? Which group of rich people do you think will be richer in a century if the literacy rates stay the same in both nations, assuming that the rich in both nations do not send their investment capital outside their respective countries? I would still guess nation B. This has nothing to do with investment decisions made by the rich. It has everything to do with the determination of the less rich to learn how to read—a determination based on their moral capital. A rising tide of literacy raises all economic ships: poor, middle class, and rich. I argue that this same principle of national wealth formation applies to moral capital in general.

Without widely distributed moral capital, today's rich people could not retain the market value of their investment capital for long. Competent and honest employees would become increasingly scarce and costly, thereby lowering the value of investment capital. Voters would become envy-driven. They would elect politicians who would seek to confiscate the wealth of the rich in the name of the poor on behalf of middle-class voters. Per capita productivity would slow, stagnate, or fall. So would the nation's wealth. The shape of the wealth distribution curve would remain the same—heavily concentrated in the top 20%—but the growth of wealth in this society would slow down or even decline.

E. To Inherit the Earth

The Bible teaches that covenant-keepers will inherit the earth.[16] If the covenant-breaking rich continue to own most of the wealth, how

16. Gary North, *Inherit the Earth: Biblical Blueprints for Economics* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987).

can covenant-keepers inherit the earth? Or are we to believe that this inheritance is post-historical? The Old Covenant texts that forecast this inheritance do not indicate that the inheritance is post-historical.

> His soul shall dwell at ease; and his seed shall inherit the earth (Ps. 25:13).
>
> For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth (Ps. 37:9).
>
> But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace (Ps. 37:11).
>
> For such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth; and they that be cursed of him shall be cut off (Ps. 37:22).[17]

How can Christians inherit the earth if the rich own most of it, and Christians are told not to seek riches? The answer: postmillennialism.[18] God's kingdom will be extended by widespread religious conversion. The vast majority of people in all income groups will be brought to saving faith. Even the rich minority will be converted. If they aren't, then they will be replaced by Christians who become wealthy through serving customers more efficiently. Inheritance of the earth will be by conversion, not by a minority of Christians buying up the assets of the world. Redemption is spiritual, not financial.

F. The Spread of the Gospel

The key factor in contributing to the permanent wealth of nations is saving grace. Special grace is fundamental. Contrary to free-market economic theory, private property is a secondary issue, for it is an outworking of God's common grace. Without special grace to some members of society, common grace cannot be sustained indefinitely.[19] The nation will eventually adopt capital-reducing measures based on envy or the desire to preserve the existing distribution of wealth. The statistical law of large numbers operates in nations.

If Pareto's rule applies internationally, as it seems to today,[20] then there will continue to be inequality, but the same minority of na-

17. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 6.

18. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *He Shall Have Dominion: A Postmillennial Eschatology*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1997).

19. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), ch. 6.

20. Eighty percent of the world's wealth is owned by 25% of the world's population. Koch, *80/20 Principle*, p. 22

tions will not retain the advantage over the others. The international wealth distribution curve will continue to be skewed to the right, but those nations inside the top quintile will change. The key issue is this: On what basis does a nation enter the top fifth? By covenant-keeping or covenant-breaking? In either case, no nation is likely to stay on top permanently. Either negative sanctions will come against covenant-breaking nations, or else other covenant-keeping nations will be blessed even more by God. But in the second instance, every covenant-keeping nation will get richer, as will rich and poor residents in all of them.

Jesus said, "Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit" (Matt. 12:33). The evil tree is eventually cut down: "Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt. 7:17–20).[21]

So, the spread of the gospel produces positive economic effects. God rewards covenantal faithfulness with prosperity (Deut. 8:18).[22] This prosperity is not to become a snare: "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth" (Deut. 8:17).[23] If it does snare the unrighteous society, then the "nothing" which it has—its wealth—will be removed from it.

The long-term movement of the kingdom of God is from poverty to wealth. To sustain their wealth and expand it, covenant-keepers must sustain their confession and their obedience to God's law. The mark of their commitment is their willingness to spend a portion of their wealth to take the good news of salvation and wealth to others. They must share their tangible capital with others, but more important, share the covenantal basis of their tangible capital: their moral capital. They must seek to take the gospel to those who suffer poverty because of their rebellion to God. *Covenant-keepers are to use their economic capital to capitalize the poor in spirit*. If those who have received wealth from God on the basis of their confession and obedience are successful in their efforts to share the wealth, the poor will get richer, and so will the rich. *Increasing productivity for all is produced when the*

21. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 18.
22. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 22.
23. *Ibid.*, ch. 21.

productivity of the poor increases. The increase in capital will increase the division of labor.

G. Unequal Distribution of Wealth

The nagging question does not go away: What about income inequality? In every modern society that economists have investigated, there is huge inequality. Twenty percent of the population owns most of the tangible wealth. Even after almost a century of steeply graduated income taxes and graduated inheritance taxes, steep inequality persists.

Pareto did not explain the existence of income inequality. In the century since he published his findings, no economist has come up with anything approaching a widely accepted explanation. We do not know why this inequality continues to exist in the face of both free market competition and socialist taxation.

The disparity in income and wealth may have something to do with disparities in future-orientation. Most people are not highly future-oriented. They are not willing to save money at low rates of interest. They prefer to borrow. They go into debt in order to buy consumer goods that depreciate. They do not get on the growth side of compound interest.

The disparity in income and wealth could be the result of inherent productivity of innovation. We might argue that successful new production methods produce enormous wealth for their early discoverers, who retain their wealth until innovative competitors find replacement methods. This explanation relies on a concept of economic growth that is overwhelmingly based on entrepreneurial skills rather than on moral capital. Surely, Christians' moral capital has not elevated them into the top 20% of wealth holders over the last century.

The entrepreneur bears a heavy load of uncertainty. Most people prefer to avoid this. They prefer predictable wages to market risks and uncertainty. They are willing to accept less income in order to avoid the loss of both capital and income. Those few entrepreneurs who survive free market competition become rich. Thus, the rich are always a minority.

An entrepreneurship-based explanation of income inequality reinforces the idea that Christians' inheritance of the earth will take place as a result of widespread conversions, not by any uniquely confession-based advantages possessed by Christians. Moral capital sustains the social order that allows entrepreneurship to produce wealth for all, but mainly for those who possess the skills. Moral capital

does not make a majority of people wealthy. It does not even make Christians wealthy in comparison to successful entrepreneurs. But it makes all men richer over time. It makes sustained economic growth possible.

Few people believe this today. Almost no economist believes it. Economists believe that the free market social order is self-reinforcing and expansionist, irrespective of God, Christianity, or supernaturalism generally. They believe that the economic fruits of capitalism will persuade voters of the truth of its roots, and the roots are found in Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*: private property and personal self-interest. God's covenant has nothing to do with it.[24]

Conclusion

The rich will get richer if their tangible wealth rests on their covenantal faithfulness, i.e., their moral capital. The expansion of covenantal wealth is based on the process of *obedience-abundance-greater obedience, greater abundance* (Deut. 8:18). This is a system of positive feedback. But if the tangible wealth of the rich is based on their faith in their own autonomy, they will eventually get poorer. Positive feedback reverses (Deut. 8:19–20).[25]

Richard Koch, who has written a book on profitable applications of Pareto's rule, thinks that positive feedback is the key to understanding why the 20-80 phenomenon exists. "In the absence of feedback loops, the natural distribution of phenomena would be 50/50—inputs of a given frequency would lead to commensurate results. It is only because of positive feedback and negative feedback loops that causes do not have equal results. Yet it also seems to be true that powerful positive feedback loops only affect a small minority of the inputs. This helps explain why those small minority of inputs can exert so much influence."[26]

Do the poor get poorer? Yes, if their poverty is spiritual. No, if their poverty is the result of their open hands to others. "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (II Cor. 8:9).[27] "But by an equality, that now at this time your

24. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), Appendix C.

25. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 23.

26. Koch, *80/20 Principle*, p. 15.

27. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 5.

abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality: As it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack" (II Cor. 8:14–15).[28]

One goal of the gospel is to make all men rich spiritually. But in achieving this, the gospel necessarily must make men tangibly richer. The covenant's upward movement of confession-obedience-wealth will spread the blessings of both tangible and spiritual wealth to more people. But it will not spread tangible wealth evenly, according to Pareto.

The top priority in this passage is to gain the abundance that comes to him who has something. "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath." This possession is redemption. He who has nothing—no redemption—will lose even the wealth that he has. This threat points to final judgment.

This process of spiritual development—positive feedback—is reflected in the realm of economics. There is a means by which the rich get richer, long term. They get richer under free market capitalism by enabling the poor to get richer. They invest capital, which provides the tools that increase the productivity of workers. The rich increase their incomes when the poor increase their incomes. Economic theory teaches that the rich do not get rich by exploiting the poor. On the contrary, they get rich by extending to others their knowledge of way to long-term wealth, i.e., compound economic growth. To sustain this process long term requires an open, merciful hand.[29] But this requires trust in the Bible's covenantal system of economic causation. It mandates trust in a supernaturally designed social order. The laws governing society are personal. They are under God's sovereignty. God has established laws of society, and these involve predictable sanctions, positive and negative. To believe this requires great faith.

28. *Ibid.*, ch. 6.
29. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 10.

7

SUFFICIENT RESOURCES

And he called unto him the twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two; and gave them power over unclean spirits; And commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only; no scrip, no bread, no money in their purse: But be shod with sandals; and not put on two coats.

MARK 6:7–9

The theocentric principle here was sanctions: point four of the biblical covenant.[1]

A. Testing Period

There is a parallel passage in Luke: "Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes: and salute no man by the way" (Luke 10:4). In Luke, it is clear that this was a temporary command. Toward the end of His pre-resurrection time of instruction, Jesus gave a new command. "And he said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing. Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one" (Luke 22:35–36). Why a sword? "Go your ways: behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves" (Luke 10:3). There is a time for lambs to arm themselves against wolves. When is this? When the testing period is over. What testing period? God's test of those who commit to Him, which is their period for testing the sovereignty of God and the reliability of God's promises in history.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

This was a special time of evangelism. They were to preach the gospel of repentance. This was before the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. They had already been empowered to cast out evil spirits. "And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, And to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils" (Mark 3:14–15). Now they were to begin the ministry of calling Israel to repentance. This was comparable to the ministry of John the Baptist. This was to be a guerilla operation. They were not to become permanent missionaries. They were not to build churches. They were not to rent permanent quarters. They were to preach and depart.

> And he said unto them, In what place soever ye enter into an house, there abide till ye depart from that place. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city. And they went out, and preached that men should repent. And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them (vv. 10–13).

B. Supernatural Resources for the Task

Their major supernatural resource was their ordination by Christ. He had given them the power to heal the sick and cast out demons. This had previously been His exclusive power. Now it was delegated to His subordinates. *This was the establishment of covenantal hierarchy*. This hierarchy was empowered supernaturally. The disciples now possessed the positive sanctions of healing and exorcism. The first is a universally respected power. The second is crucial in societies in which demon-possession is widespread.

The other supernatural resource was their ability to raise money. This may have involved part-time labor, but probably not. They would stay in the homes of listeners. This means there would be listeners with homes and hearts for hospitality. This is supernatural. It is surely not natural. It was also temporary, as we have seen. Jesus later commanded them to take a purse and a sword.

The goal here was the presentation of the message that John the Baptist had offered: repentance. It mandated an ethical transformation. It mandated a readiness to follow Jesus, wherever that might lead and require. This was before His death, resurrection, and ascension. This was before Pentecost. It was before the establishment of the church. This was an Old Covenant ministry of preparation.

Under the best of circumstances, this would have been a high-risk endeavor. Who would listen to them? Why? Only because they possessed supernatural powers of healing. Supernatural authority would validate their message. It would lead some listeners to trust them. There would be some people who would respond favorably, providing food and shelter. But most would not respond favorably, any more than the masses had responded favorably to Jesus' call to repentance. For most listeners, the disciples' ministry would serve as a ministry of confrontation and rejection.

Theirs was not a ministry of kingdom-building. It was a ministry of kingdom rejection. Their task was to make a general call to repentance, on the assumption that few would respond. Few did. This was a first-stage ministry, just as John the Baptist's was a first-stage ministry. *The entire Old Covenant was a first-stage ministry*.

The resources required for the task were temporary. They had no money, no food, and no weapons of self-defense. They also had no long-term program of church planting. They had the power to heal the sick and exorcise demons. These powers were sufficient to attract attention, gather a crowd, and make possible the call to repentance. These were insufficient to build a permanent church. That would come only in phase two: after the ascension of Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Their powers to heal were designed to increase their trust in Jesus and His ministry. His ministry was covenantal. There would be a transfer of authority. This was a major preliminary transfer of authority: authority over sickness.

C. A Stage-One Ministry

Jesus provided sufficient resources for them to complete their initial assignments. These assignments were two-fold: (1) to give Israel an opportunity finally to reject the first-stage message of repentance, and (2) to give the messengers confidence in their access to supernatural power. Luke recorded that this grant of authority extended to 70 more disciples. "After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come" (Luke 10:1). They would take the ministry of repentance to the entire nation.

> And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name. And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Behold, I give unto you power to tread on

> serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven. In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight (Luke 10:17–21).

Their success in healing and casting out demons was to confirm them in their faith. It was to give them confidence. To do what? To enter God's second-stage ministry: the New Covenant.

Their activities confirmed prophecies of the Old Covenant regarding the coming of the New Covenant.

> And he turned him unto his disciples, and said privately, Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see: For I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them (Luke 10:23–24).

But there were also failures. These failures had a function in the training of the disciples. They were to convey to the disciples a far wider vision. The disciples were merely tapping into a few of the supernatural resources that would later be made available to them.

> Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out? And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting (Matt. 17:19–21).

Mark's version of this interaction was incomplete. "And when he was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could not we cast him out? And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting" (Mark 9:28–29). They were to accomplish more than just heal people. They were to change history. They were to move mountains: entire cultures.

At the end of His ministry, Jesus gave a new assignment to the surviving 11 disciples.

> Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen. And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that

> believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues (Mark 16:14–17).

There would be extensions of supernatural power to those who received the gospel. This would be the first stage of God's second-stage ministry: the New Covenant.

Conclusion

The initial miracles of the final phase of the first-stage ministry of the Old Covenant confirmed the fact that Jesus was the Son of God. He delegated supernatural powers to His disciples. The exercise of these powers confirmed their ordination. It gave them confidence. It increased their trust in Jesus. It also increased their trust in themselves, by way of their subordination to Jesus. It opened a vision of far greater challenges that would extend far beyond the geography of the nation of Israel.

Jesus told the disciples not to take money, food, or swords in their journey through the land. They would not need these economic resources. They had been giving healing power. That was sufficient. But it was sufficient only for this final phase of God's first-stage ministry of the Old Covenant. After that covenant ended, the disciples would possess the same supernatural power, but they were to plan as well. They would need money, food, and swords. The miracles would be necessary, but not sufficient for their task. Like manna in the wilderness, their supernatural powers were gifts from God to increase their trust in Him. Once this trust was secure, Jesus changed the rules. They could once again trust money, food, and weapons. They would henceforth see these capital assets as operating within a framework of supernatural power. They would not see this capital as either impersonal or autonomous.

They had to trust God for the capital necessary to complete their first assignment. They were not to trust capital goods: money, food, or swords. They needed success without marketable capital in order to prepare them for the next stage of their ministry as disciples. Success would confirm their trust, enabling them to exercise greater trust. Positive sanctions are given to confirm the covenant. As Moses told the Israelites, "But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deut. 8:18).

8

THE COST OF POOR JUDGMENT

And when a convenient day was come, that Herod on his birthday made a supper to his lords, high captains, and chief estates of Galilee; And when the daughter of the said Herodias came in, and danced, and pleased Herod and them that sat with him, the king said unto the damsel, Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give it thee. And he sware unto her, Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom. And she went forth, and said unto her mother, What shall I ask? And she said, The head of John the Baptist. And she came in straightway with haste unto the king, and asked, saying, I will that thou give me by and by in a charger the head of John the Baptist. And the king was exceeding sorry; yet for his oath's sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her. And immediately the king sent an executioner, and commanded his head to be brought: and he went and beheaded him in the prison, And brought his head in a charger, and gave it to the damsel: and the damsel gave it to her mother.

MARK 6:21–28

The theocentric principle here was judgment: point four of the biblical covenant.[1] The story of the girl who danced for King Herod is more generally known as the dance of the seven veils. She has come down through history as Salomé. There is no textual evidence in any of the Gospels regarding her name or what she wore. This indicates that the embellished story has considerable independent appeal to the general public. People are fascinated by this story of a girl and her mother.

The Bible's story conveys above all the hatred of the mother toward a man who had publicly accused her husband of having violated a Mosaic law. This is not how the general public understands the story. It is also not how most Christians understand the story.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

A. The Prophet and the Ruler

John The Baptist was a prophet. Jesus called him a great prophet under the Old Covenant. "For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he" (Luke 7:28). As a prophet, he brought a covenant lawsuit against individuals: "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt 3:2b).

He brought a covenant lawsuit against Herod, who had married his brother's wife. The Mosaic law was clear. "Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of thy brother's wife: it is thy brother's nakedness" (Lev. 18:16).

> For Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife: for he had married her. For John had said unto Herod, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife. Therefore Herodias had a quarrel against him, and would have killed him; but she could not: For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly (Mark 6:17–20).

The prophet publicly humiliated Herod and his wife by his accusation. This was an assault against civil power. His accusation undermined Israelites' confidence in Herod's leadership. Herod had openly violated a Mosaic law. It would have been widely known that he had done so, but here was a prophet bringing a covenant lawsuit against Herod publicly, based on Herod's violation of a Mosaic statute.

Because so many Christians believe that the specifics of the Mosaic law do not extend into the New Covenant era, they do not see the confrontation between John the Baptist and Herod in terms of a covenant lawsuit. They do not understand that the function of the Old Testament prophet was to bring a covenant lawsuit in full public view against those who had violated an important Mosaic law. Modern Christians do not think a great deal about the marital statutes of the Mosaic law. John the Baptist did think about them. He thought about them so much that he brought a covenant lawsuit against Herod.

B. A Woman Scorned

This public confrontation between John the Baptist and Herod enraged his wife. So enraged was she that when she was given an opportunity to advise her daughter regarding payment for the dance, she did not recommend that her daughter gain any economic advantage

whatsoever. She advised her daughter to ask that Herod fulfill his vow by executing her enemy.

Even though John the Baptist had confronted Herod, Herod was not his enemy. Herod understood that he had violated a Mosaic statute, and he also understood that John the Baptist was a prophet. He understood that the function of the prophet was to bring covenant lawsuits against violators of the Mosaic law. He threw John the Baptist into prison because of the pressure that his wife put on him. Now, she would exact public tribute from him. He had promised her daughter—his stepdaughter and niece—that she could have anything she wanted, up to half his kingdom. He said this in a moment of weakness. To refuse her would be to go back on his word, which he had given in full public view. It would expose him as unreliable. So, he consented to her request.

Herodias is reminiscent of Jezebel. She knew what she wanted: to destroy the prophet of God. So did Jezebel. Her husband, like Jezebel's husband Ahab, also did not have good independent judgment. John the Baptist paid a heavier price than Elijah paid. He paid that price because a young woman was devoid of common sense.

C. Limited Expectations

The girl could dance well. She had no ambitions beyond being a good dancer. She had no idea of what she should request of her stepfather. She could have received economic resources, such as land or a home. This would have constituted a dowry for her marriage. But she was entirely present-oriented. She had no ability to think for herself. She was also completely dependent on her mother. She trusted her mother's judgment. This trust was misplaced.

Her mother had exceptionally poor judgment. Instead of advising her daughter to ask for something of real value for her daughter's life and future, she used this opportunity to extract vengeance on her enemy. She imposed the ultimate negative civil sanction against him: execution. More than this, she demanded his beheading. John the Baptist's head would be presented to her on a plate. She wanted symbolic vengeance against him, not just his death.

From a common-sense standpoint, the daughter paid a heavy price. What did she pay? First, she paid a price in demonstrating that she was a fool. People knew that she could have asked for a great deal of wealth. She could have secured her future. Instead, she asked for the head of John the Baptist, despite the fact that John the Baptist never

accused her of doing anything wrong. She was obviously acting as an agent of her mother. Second, she forfeited all of the economic benefits that her stepfather would have been willing to give to her. Third, she forfeited the favor of her stepfather, for her request pressured him into doing something that he would not otherwise have done. She sacrificed her future for the sake of her mother's vengeance. She did not have to follow her mother's advice, but she did. She placed herself under the authority of a vicious woman with extremely poor judgment. This was the comprehensive price that she paid for the death of John the Baptist.

She has come down through history with the reputation of being one of the truly shortsighted women of all time. The public has heard the story of a girl who could dance, and who refused to profit from her opportunity. Her story is one of the classic stories in history of somebody who had an opportunity and bungled it. She had been gifted in terms of her physical ability, but was remarkably un-gifted with respect to judgment. She was present-oriented. She had no independent judgment of her own. She took the advice of somebody who had even worse judgment than she did. She became the agent of an evil woman. She had no perception of just how evil mother was long before she sought her mother's advice. She obviously had no ethical judgment whatsoever. She was, in the modern phrase, an airhead.

D. Comparing Costs and Benefits

From the point of view of modern economic theory, she made a rational calculation. She compared expected future costs and expected future benefits that would result from her decision. She decided in terms of benefits. Thus, the dancing girl did not make an irrational decision. It was entirely rational. The economist says that we always ask this question: "What's in it for me?"

From a biblical standpoint, this is too narrow a focus of concern. The covenant-keeper is supposed to ask: "What's in it for the kingdom of God?" This also includes the question of self-interest. "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33).[2]

We have surveyed the costs of her decision. The benefits she forfeited constituted the cost of whatever benefit she gained. If a person is unaware of a lost opportunity, it is not a cost to him when he makes

2. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew* , 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 15.

his decision. It is a cost to him only if he finds out. This is the logic of subjective value theory. Ignorance is bliss. It reduces our costs of action.

Covenant-keepers are supposed to believe that men should seek more information. They should also seek more wisdom.

> Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding (Prov. 3:13).
>
> Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth (Prov. 4:5).
>
> Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding (Prov. 4:7).

This necessarily increases our costs of decision-making and action. Why? Greater responsibility.

> The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more (Luke 12:47–48).[3]

The goal of the dominion covenant (Gen. 1:26–28) is the extension of the kingdom of God in history.[4] This is also the goal of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20).[5]

Maybe the dancing girl did calculate the cost of obeying her mother versus the cost of not obeying her mother. We do not know what she thought. We know only what she did. But, on the basis of what she did in response to her mother's advice, the world has listened to the story of her decision because her decision was so preposterously stupid. She lacked wisdom.

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3. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000]), ch. 28.

4. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 3.

5. Kenneth L. Gentry, *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990). Cf. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 48.

Conclusion

This story reveals the lack of wisdom of a king, who made an outrageous promise in a moment of weakness. Second, it reveals a young woman's lack of wisdom in following her mother's immoral advice. Third, it reveals a mother's unwillingness to place her daughter's interest above her own. These decisions had consequences. One of them was the fact that this story has long extended into the general culture of the West. It is a classic account of people with poor judgment. The other was that the last of the great prophets of the Old Covenant died. He was replaced by the Great Prophet, Jesus Christ. So close was Christ to John the Baptist that Herod wondered if Jesus was John resurrected (Mark 6:16). The transition to the New Covenant involved the death of John the Baptist and the death and resurrection of Jesus. Herod was in a position to spare both of their lives. He refused.

> And as soon as he knew that he belonged unto Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem at that time. And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad: for he was desirous to see him of a long season, because he had heard many things of him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by him. Then he questioned with him in many words; but he answered him nothing. And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused him. And Herod with his men of war set him at nought, and mocked him, and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him again to Pilate. And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together: for before they were at enmity between themselves (Luke 23:7–12).

Herod could have let Him go free. But he did not have good judgment. Later, he had James the brother of John executed (Acts 12:12). He had Peter imprisoned. Finally, he trusted the judgment of sycophants who surrounded him.

> And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost. But the word of God grew and multiplied (Acts 12:21–24).

From beginning to end, he had poor judgment. He paid a heavy price. The cost of poor judgment is high.

9

FEEDING THE MULTITUDES: A JOINT VENTURE

> *And they sat down in ranks, by hundreds, and by fifties. And when he had taken the five loaves and the two fishes, he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and brake the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before them; and the two fishes divided he among them all. And they did all eat, and were filled. And they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments, and of the fishes. And they that did eat of the loaves were about five thousand men.*
>
> MARK 6:40–44

The theocentric principle here was Jesus' sovereignty over nature. He demonstrated His supernatural authority over nature in front of huge crowds. Authority is point two of the biblical covenant.[1]

This was the first feeding of the multitudes. The parallel passage in Matthew provides additional information. First, Jesus healed people before He fed them. "And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick" (Matt. 14:14). Second, there were women and children. "And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, beside women and children" (Matt. 14:21). He fed them all.

The difference between 5,000 and, say, 20,000 is marginal. The impossibility of feeding 5,000 is sufficient. Beyond that, the extra numbers were superfluous. The entire scene was inconceivable.

Jesus did not feed them directly. There was insufficient time for Him to separate loaves and fishes, one at a time, to feed 20,000 people. If it took five seconds to divide a fish and a loaf, feeding 20,000 people

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economic, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1982] 2010), ch. 2.

would have taken 27 hours. That is just dividing the fishes and loaves. That does not count the time it took for passing the broken pieces to the crowd. Jesus could multiply the food, but He was constrained by time. Conclusion: Jesus passed broken pieces of the bread and the fishes to His disciples, and they in turn passed additional broken pieces to people in the front ranks of the multitudes. Family by family, people divided the food and passed it along. It was a joint venture.

You may have heard more than one sermon on the feeding of the multitudes. Did the preacher ever mention the time constraint? I think not. The mental picture is a stop-action image of Jesus dutifully dividing the loaves and fishes. But if He did this miracle alone, the mental image should be a speeded-up moving picture, with Jesus as some sort of impossibly fast divider of food.

Did they locate hundreds of baskets to pass out food to a crowd of 20,000? This is unlikely. There were 12 filled baskets at the end of the miracle. That means one basket per disciple. This is conceivable. Each disciple shared his food basket. But how did Jesus get the food to the masses? He used the 12 baskets. Each family had to receive a basket, remove food, and pass the basket along. The baskets kept filling up with food. If only 12 baskets were involved, it took about 400 transfers, family head to family head, to pass the baskets to 5,000 families. At 10 seconds per transfer, that is 4,000 seconds, or a little over an hour. This is conceivable.

It should be clear that this miracle was a joint venture. So was the second miracle of feeding.

> And he commanded the people to sit down on the ground: and he took the seven loaves, and gave thanks, and brake, and gave to his disciples to set before them; and they did set them before the people. And they had a few small fishes: and he blessed, and commanded to set them also before them. So they did eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets. And they that had eaten were about four thousand: and he sent them away (Mark 8:6–9).

Mark said the crowd numbered 4,000. We learn from Matthew that there were women and children (Matt. 15:38).

This time, the multitudes had waited for three days for a second miracle of feeding (Mark 8:2). Clearly, word had spread about the first miracle. People wanted to see one just like it. They also wanted to participate in it, just as the first witnesses had. Jesus made them wait. This was a three-day fast. He could have performed the same miracle at any time. He refused. He tested their commitment. Did they trust Him?

A. The Division of Labor

Neither miracle would have been possible in the time available, had Jesus not adopted the power of the division of labor. Had he stood in front of the assembled masses, dutifully dividing loaves and fishes, using only a dozen baskets, the miracle would have taken days. There was only one way for the miracle to occur: through joint participation.

This was a miracle comparable to the manna in the wilderness. There were about 2.5 million Israelites in the wilderness.[2] The manna appeared every evening (Ex. 16:13–14).[3] The Israelites filled containers with manna (vv. 16–18). The stored manna rotted after one day (v. 20). It melted on the ground in the afternoon (v. 21). This daily miracle was compounded by the fact that on the sixth day of the week, there was a double portion. The next day, the sabbath, there was none (vv. 22–27). There was no time to lose. The families had to gather manna before morning. They were joint participants in this daily miracle for 40 years.

Jesus' miracle of the feeding hearkened back to the manna. He provided a miracle at the front end of the process, but to appropriate it for themselves, people had to participate. Jesus' time spent in breaking apart the loaves and fishes would have been minimal: a few minutes, at most. He divided the loaves and fishes, placed them in the baskets, and handed them to others, presumably the disciples. Then each disciple handed his basket to someone in the crowd. The heads of households took their families' share and passed on the basket. If baskets were not used, then the heads of households did this by hand. They divided fishes and loaves. This is conceivable, although the use of baskets would have been more convenient. The disciples shared their baskets, first with Jesus, then with the crowd.

The crowd participated. They saw the miracle take place in front of their own eyes. They saw food multiplied as it was passed along. Each family performed its role in a mass miracle. Each family would remember the day when the head of the household performed a minor part of a miracle. Word would have spread rapidly.

The fact that there was food left over was confirmation that there was sufficient food for all. This was a clear violation of the laws of physics. This was a form of re-creation. It was not performed at the front of a large audience by a magician barely visible to the people at

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 1.
3. *Ibid*., ch. 18.

the back of the crowd. Every family participated face-to-face.

The miracle took place only because everyone passed along a basket. Every household head took what his family needed and then passed on the basket. In the wilderness, this had been the experience of the people.

> This is the thing which the LORD hath commanded, Gather of it every man according to his eating, an omer for every man, according to the number of your persons; take ye every man for them which are in his tents. And the children of Israel did so, and gathered, some more, some less. And when they did mete it with an omer, he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack; they gathered every man according to his eating (Ex. 16:16–18).

This was also the experience of those who participated in the feeding of the multitude.

Anyone who kept a basket called a halt to the miracle. The pressure to pass on the basket must have been intense. There was internal pressure: to be a full participant, a person had to pass on the blessing, not end it. There was external pressure: the next family's desire to participate. The baskets kept moving down the lines.

The miracles of the two feedings were possible only because there was joint participation. The more the participation, the greater the miracle. Each family had a small role to play. Each family was rewarded: a free lunch. But there is no such thing as a free lunch, economists tell us. Most of the time, they are correct. But in these two cases, there were free lunches for tens of thousands of participants.

Each task was easy: divide the loaves and fish, and then pass on the leftovers. Jesus started this. The disciples continued it. The multitudes participated. No one could easily deny the reality of the miracle, because everyone participated. It was just like the manna. Word spread. The second crowd waited three days to participate.

B. Time and Productivity

The two miracles of feeding the multitudes was made possible in the time available only by joint participation. The division of labor made the miracles possible.

We have limited time in our lives. We have limited resources. The miracles of the feeding rested on this promise: *the limitation on men's resources is less important than the limitation on men's time. Time is the crucial resource*. Jesus multiplied loaves and fish. He did not multiply

time. The second crowd had to wait three days to participate in the miracle. Jesus could have divided fishes and loaves, day and night, to perform a one-man miracle. Instead, he made them wait. He wanted their active participation, not their passive receptivity to a free lunch.

Jesus reminded His followers that they had roles to play. He initiated the two miracles. The crowds implemented them, piece by piece. *A sense of community was part of the miracle.* He fed their stomachs. He gave them hope. But they could benefit from both food and hope only through their active participation.

Conclusion

The principle of the division of labor was reinforced by the division of loaves and fishes. The participants could say, "Look what we did." They were allowed to become miracle workers. Everyone participated. The tasks were simple: receive a basket, divide the food, remove a portion of the food—probably half—and pass on the basket. The lesson? "There's more where that came from." This built men's confidence. God is sovereign over creation. The curse of the ground (Gen. 3:17–19) is temporary.

The lack of time is more of a restriction than the lack of food. This is true for all mankind. We are mortal. When food runs out, we can usually get more food. When time runs out, we cannot get more time. Jesus' parable of the barn builder made this plain.

> And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God (Luke 12:16–21).[4]

The rich man trusted in himself rather than God. This cost him dearly.

The participants in the miracle trusted Jesus to feed them. Their trust was rewarded. The second crowd trusted Him for three days, based on the story of the previous feeding. Their trust was rewarded.

4. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 25.

Yet they did not follow Him after His crucifixion. Their trust ran out. They trusted in what they had seen, but they did not trust the story of resurrection from the dead. That seemed too far-fetched. They had trusted their own eyes, but that was the limit of their trust. More trust is needed in order to enter the kingdom of God. "Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20:29).

10

SUPPORTING OUR PARENTS

> *For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye.*
>
> MARK 7:8–13

The theocentric principle here is trust in the written law of God: point three of the biblical covenant.[1] This is contrasted with trust in the oral traditions of men.

A. Oral Tradition

These words are Jesus' response to the Pharisees' criticism of His ministry. The Pharisees had pointed out that Jesus' disciples did not wash their hands before eating bread. There is nothing in the Mosaic law that indicates any such requirement. The Pharisees had added this requirement much later. They had done so on the basis of a misinterpretation of what defiles a person.

According to the Mosaic law, certain ritual washings were required when a person was ritually defiled, such as by coming in contact with

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

a dead body (Num. 19:16). Leviticus 14 and 15 list a number of these required ritual cleansings. The Pharisees had extended a specific but highly circumscribed liturgical requirement—washing one's hands—to apply to eating. This interpretation assumed that there is something defiling in unwashed hands, something that is transferred to all food. So, the Pharisees required their followers to wash their hands before eating anything. Mark 7:4 records that there were other requirements, such as the washing of cups, pots, bronze vessels, and tables.

These requirements were part of what Jesus called the tradition of the elders. They were part of an oral tradition. This oral tradition was not yet written down. That would begin about a century later: the Mishnah.

It was on the basis of this oral tradition that the Pharisees and scribes asked Jesus why his disciples did not walk according to the traditions of the elders. Why did they eat bread with unwashed hands? In response, Jesus cited the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah had identified certain Israelites as hypocrites who honored God with their lips, but their hearts were far from God (Isa. 29:13). This was more than a theological response. It was a covenant lawsuit. Jesus was identifying them as having broken the law in the name of keeping the law. They were keeping the traditions of men rather than following the commandments of God. This was a very serious accusation.

B. Honoring Parents

He then gave a specific example of this substitution of tradition for the Mosaic law. He cited the law regarding the honoring of parents (Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16). He also cited the law that prohibited the cursing of one's father or mother.

> And he that curseth his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death (Ex. 21:17).
>
> For every one that curseth his father or his mother shall be surely put to death: he hath cursed his father or his mother; his blood shall be upon him (Lev. 20:9).

The law against cursing parents had a specific negative sanction: the death penalty. Anyone who violated a law that was so important that it mandated the death penalty had violated an extremely important law. Jesus was saying that the Pharisees had violated such a law.

He did not say that they had verbally cursed their parents. He did say that they had attempted to escape from their responsibilities

for supporting their parents. They escaped these responsibilities by invoking a higher principle: *corban*. This was a special gift that someone presented to God. It was part of a vow. Jesus said that they were using this as an excuse not to support their parents financially. They owed the support to their parents, but they gave the money to the temple instead.

Why was this a violation of the fifth commandment? Isn't it the case that a gift to God takes precedence over a gift to parents? This is indeed the case, but that was not the judicial issue facing the Pharisees. Jesus was saying that the Pharisees owed payment to the parents. This payment was not a gift. Instead of paying what they owed to their parents, they tried to gain credit for themselves by making a special gift in the name of God. They were not giving their own money, Jesus implied. They were giving money that they owed to their parents.

In the first case, namely, supporting their parents, they had no option in the eyes of God. It was a moral and legal responsibility that they support their parents. They did not have the authority to transfer wealth to anyone else, if this wealth belonged to their parents, as mandated by biblical law. Jesus was saying that this money belonged to their parents. They were to act as stewards of this money on behalf of their parents.

This was a strong support of one of the Ten Commandments. Jesus was saying that a specific Mosaic ordinance took precedence over gifts to the temple or anyone else. Because the money belonged to the parents, with the children acting as stewards on behalf of the parents, the children did not have the authority to give the money to any other organization or person. Jesus said that the Pharisees allowed individuals to escape their obligations to their parents by transferring funds to the temple. He was saying that this was an example of their hypocrisy. In the name of God, they transferred wealth that did not belong to them. The goodness of the cause did not abrogate their responsibility to their parents. The parents had first legal claim on the money.

On what legal basis do parents possess such a claim? On the basis of the Mosaic law. God has established in His law the system of authority that families are required to honor. One of the requirements of family authority is that children are to support their parents whenever their parents are no longer able to support themselves. This is an aspect of the fifth commandment (Ex. 20:12)[2]. So important is this

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 25.

commandment, Jesus said, that to violate it is the equivalent of cursing father and mother. So important is this legal claim to financial support that Jesus criticized the Pharisees as having committed the equivalent of a capital crime. By refusing to support their parents, they were acting as criminals. God did not look favorably on their gifts to Him whenever these gifts were in fact owed to the parents. The Pharisees could buy no favor with God, because they were acting as thieves. They were stealing wealth of belonged to the parents in using this wealth to fund the temple.

C. A Defense of Theonomy

This is a strong affirmation of the continuing validity of the Mosaic law in New Testament times. Jesus invoked one of the Ten Commandments in his criticism of the Pharisees. He used the Mosaic law to expose them as hypocrites.

He went so far as to take a Mosaic case law relating to the family, namely, the law prohibiting the cursing of parents, and applied this law to what would seem to be a relatively minor infraction: paying money to the temple. This was a major infraction. The refusal to support one's parents is the equivalent of cursing one's parents. This was not intuitive from a reading of the Mosaic law, but it is how the followers of Jesus are supposed to interpret the fifth commandment and its applications.

Those Christians who insist that the Ten Commandments do not apply in New Testament times are worse than the Pharisees. The Pharisees did not deny that they were under the authority of the Ten Commandments. They invented a loophole, one which was based on the transfer of wealth to the temple. They did not try to keep the money for themselves. Modern Christians, in contrast, insist on keeping the money for themselves. They do this by denying the continuing authority of the Mosaic law in New Testament times. They say that they are under grace, not law. They regard Jesus' words as no longer binding on Christians. He spoke these words to Pharisees during the Old Covenant era. His words here supposedly have no binding legal authority today. Christians insist that neither modern Pharisees (Orthodox Jews)[3] nor modern Christians are under the terms of the Mosaic Covenant, and therefore it is illegitimate to invoke the Mosaic law regarding the support of parents, let alone the Mosaic law pro-

3. Orthodox Jews self-consciously identify themselves with the Pharisees, who replaced the Sadducees after the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

hibiting the cursing the parents. Those laws are seen as completely annulled. They have no continuing authority.

D. Old Age Insurance and Trust

By requiring sons to support their parents financially, biblical law establishes an economic framework based on trust. Parents need not fear old age as much as they would if they were not guaranteed support. Children understand their obligations. God has imposed this system. Their parents' legal claim to support rests on biblical law. The parents are in this sense agents of God. Their presence reminds children of their obligations to God. The parents are representatives of God.

This system of family insurance reduces risk. It allows people greater confidence in the future. They become less grasping, less driven by a need to accumulate wealth in preparation for old age. They are willing to bear more risk in their efforts to extend the kingdom of God in history. They can trust in God because they can trust in their children.

This gives them an incentive to teach biblical law to their children. The requirement to support aged parents is part of a comprehensive system of law. People are supposed to trust all of it. If they do not trust all of it, on what basis can they trust any of it? Conclusion: parents had better teach all of it.

Conclusion

Jesus accused the Pharisees of being hypocrites. They had added to the Mosaic law an oral tradition that they believed had greater authority than biblical law. They made these additions in the name of Moses. This was illegitimate, Jesus said. It was hypocritical.

He made His point by pointing to a substitution of a practice of voluntary giving to the temple in place of a law of moral obligation. In the name of God, they substituted that which was voluntary for that which was required. In doing this, they had committed a serious crime—so serious that it was the judicial equivalent of cursing one's parents, a capital crime.

11

TO GAIN THE WHOLE WORLD[1]

> *For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*
>
> MARK 8:36–37

The theocentric principle here is the final judgment of God: sanctions, point four of the biblical covenant. Every man faces the final judgment. Compared to the loss of one's soul at this judgment, the gaining of everything that life has to offer is nothing.

A. Mammon vs. God: Trust

To understand this message, we need to consider the parallel passage in Matthew.

> Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom (Matt 16:24–28).

Jesus was speaking of lifelong service to Him through the cross. This was a reference to His death, although they did not know this at the time. He carried His cross to Golgotha. He lost His life. He gained total power as a result. "And Jesus came and spake unto them,

1. Adapted from Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 35.

saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18). He was the model.

He posed this to His disciples. "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24).[2] Moses presented a similar challenge. "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live" (Deut. 30:19). Mammon is a principle, not a god. It is a confession of faith: "More for me in history."[3]

B. Free Grace Is Not Cheap

Jesus warned His disciples that there are no free lunches in life. There is free grace, but it comes at a price. It comes, first and foremost, at the price of the death of Jesus Christ. Redeemed people owe a lifetime service to God through Christ (Rom. 12:1).[4] But this service is insufficient to pay for eternal life. We know this because of the subsequent comparison: all the world could not redeem one man's soul. Anything less than this is also insufficient.

Obviously, these words are not to be interpreted literally. Nobody is asked to take up a literal cross. Perhaps some follower of Jesus was asked to do so under Roman rule, but we are not informed of this. Crucifixion is no longer any nation's means of execution except possibly in rare cases where Christians are executed this way as a symbol of their subordination to an anti-Christian state. In any case, one does not carry a cross through a lifetime of service.

The imagery here is that of a burden that costs a person his life. The cross is heavy. At the end of the journey, it becomes the means of his execution. Taking up the cross means taking up the pre-resurrection life of Christ. It means death to the things of this world. A man carrying a cross is not going to be easily distracted by the things of this world. He has other things on his mind . . . and on his back.

The text warns: "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt. 16:25). This is not a call to literal suicide. It is a call for *covenantal death*. The old Adamic nature (old man) is executed. Paul provided a commentary on this passage:

2. *Ibid*, ch. 14.
3. *Idem*.
4. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 9.

> Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof (Rom. 6:3–12).

To say that we pay a price is to say that we give up something. What do we give up? Our old ways: the sins of the flesh. We forfeit the use of these attributes of Adam. Whatever pleasures or benefits they bring in history, we must give them up. This is the economist's meaning of cost: the most valuable thing foregone. There are no free lunches. We must give up something to gain eternal life. But the basis of our entrance into eternal life is not our payment.

C. The Fearful Exchange

"For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" There is an American joke about lawyers. Satan comes to a newly certified lawyer and says: "I will give you the gift of persuasion. You will become a world-famous defense lawyer. I will enable you to get juries to declare guilty criminals innocent, for which these evil men will pay you huge fees. You will become the envy of your peers. All I ask in return is your eternal soul at the end of a life of enormous success." To which the lawyer replies: "What's the catch?"[5]

Jesus warned against this exchange. If gaining the whole world is a bad bargain for the loss of one's soul, then gaining anything less is a worse bargain. This is what present-oriented men do not acknowledge. They either reject the thought of eternal judgment on these

5. The existence of hundreds of anti-lawyer jokes in the United States indicates a widespread distrust and resentment against lawyers as against no other profession. The public understands that the legal profession offers great wealth to those who pervert the intention of the law, i.e., to be a terror to evil-doers. Lawyers are not penalized professionally for misusing the law in order to get rich by terrorizing the innocent.

terms or else they discount the future cost to such a low level that the exchange seems worth it. This exchange of the eternal in favor of the temporal is the essence of foolishness.

Time offers what appear to be ways out of trouble. There is always an option, a way of escape. This faith is a reflection of an ethical truth: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (I Cor. 10:13). But eternity does not possess this characteristic feature of time. In eternity, there is no escape. This is unimaginable to the time-bound sinner who thinks he can find a way not to pay for his sins. There is only one such way: "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10:9–10). But this way of escape places a new perceptual burden on man: his recognition of *the high price of sin*. As the price of sin rises, less of it will be demanded, other things being equal.

The problem is, when sin is involved, other things do not remain equal. Sin has the characteristic feature of being addictive. The more you get, the more you want. The insatiable nature of sin leads some men into early death. They cannot control their addiction. Sin is like a ratchet upward: one level becomes normal, so new sins are sought out. But in a redeemed person, the insatiable nature of sin is reversed. He reaches a level of sinning that he recognizes as self-destructive. He sees the high price of sin. He then demands less of it. In fact, he can create an ethically positive ratchet: as he indulges in fewer sins, he finds that his taste for old ones and even new ones is reduced.

This fact runs counter to what economics teaches. Economics teaches us that when the price of something is reduced, more of it is demanded. This is expressed graphically by a demand curve that slopes downward and to the right. Price is expressed on the vertical axis, and quantity is on the horizontal axis.

God's redemption of sinners lowers their eternal price for an individual sin. This is because the redeemed person is not condemned eternally when he sins. Why, then, should he not indulge himself all the more? After all, the price is lower. Answer: *because redemption changes his taste for sin*. In the terminology of graph-dependent economists, his entire demand curve for sin shifts to the left: reduced demand for sin all along the curve.

Paul understood the logic of economics in this application, and he rejected the conclusion. "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord. What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" (Rom. 5:19–6:2). Other things, such as the demand curve for sin, do not remain equal. The redeemed sinner's taste for sin is reduced.

Redemption increases a man's perception of eternity. It lengthens a man's time perspective. It increases his future-orientation. This makes it possible for him to count the cost of his thoughts and actions (Luke 14:28–30).[6] Man always discounts the future. The more distant in the future an expected event, the less it affects a person's decision-making today. The payoff, discounted to the present, is too low, either for benefits or losses. But if a man discounts eternity's effects to nearly zero, in the way that he discounts events a century hence, he has made a disastrous miscalculation. He does not grasp how important time is for the outcome in eternity. He compares time to time. He should be comparing time to eternity. The discount that he applies to very distant events is influenced by his knowledge that he will not be here to see the results of his actions. But eternity is different. He will be there to see the results of his actions, and to experience them (Luke 16:23; Rev. 20:14–15).

Conclusion

Men set their priorities in terms of their values and their expectations about the future. Jesus said that our values should reflect the future—specifically, eternity. Any set of values that does not incorporate expectations about eternity must be wrong, He taught. The soul survives beyond the grave. Thus, any cost-benefit analysis in history should include costs or benefits in eternity.

The price of eternal life is sacrificial living in history (Rom. 12:1).[7] Christ's life of complete subordination to God and His undeserved death have set the judicial standard. He definitively paid the price.

6. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 35.
7. North, *Cooperation and Dominion*, ch. 8.

Taking up the cross and losing one's life for Christ's sake are aspects of the great exchange: a costly eternity vs. a beneficial eternity. Life is the constant exchange of one set of conditions for another. This includes eternal life. One way of life is exchanged for one kind of eternity. This exchange is *definitive* in history: God's judicial imputation to sinners of Christ's righteousness (Rom. 3:24–25; Phil. 3:9). It is also *progressive:* working out one's salvation in fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12).[8] It is also *final* (Matt. 25; Rev. 20:14–15).

The marketplace of the soul is history. A man cannot buy back his soul. Either it has been bought back by Christ or it cannot be bought back at all. From whom is it bought back? From God, who is sovereign over the souls of men. So, trust God.

8. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 20.

12

THE SERVICE PRINCIPLE[1]

> *And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.*
>
> MARK 9:35

The theocentric principle here was the servanthood of Christ in His capacity as the son of man, i.e., representative man. This is point two of the biblical covenant: representation or hierarchy.[2]

> But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many (Matt. 10:42–45).

He did this also in His capacity as the Son of God.

> Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should

1. This is adapted from Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 51.

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economic, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1982] 2010), ch. 2.

> bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:5–11).[3]

Jesus also said this: "He that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve" (Luke 22:26). Jesus made it plain that dominion is a legitimate goal. But it is a peculiar kind of dominion. To be great, one must serve. To give commands, one must serve those who are commanded. This implies hierarchy. God has placed man over the creation (Gen. 1:26–28).[4] Some men are placed legally over other men. This is the doctrine of *judicial representation*—also an aspect of point two. The question is: What are the legitimate means of attaining dominion?

A. Hierarchy

A man wants to be first: the top of the hierarchy. This is a widespread desire. Jesus said that the princes of the gentiles exercise authority over their subordinates. This means that they issue commands, and these commands must be followed. Those who refuse to obey face negative sanctions. This is the kind of authority that Jesus exercised over sickness. When the Roman centurion described his own authority over his troops as analogous Jesus' authority over illness, Jesus praised this confession of faith. He healed the man's servant from a distance, which the centurion had affirmed that He could do, so great was His authority (Matt. 8:8–10).

This form of military command is not the model for the church's government. The military is a subset of civil government. The military serves the nation. Officers serve the nation best by placing at risk their lives and the lives of their men. Yet, even here, the wise officer places his men's interests above his own. He protects his men's lives before he protects his career. He obeys orders that place his men at extreme risk, not to advance his career, but to serve as a model for his men. A battle plan sometimes involves the deliberate sacrifice of some units. Even here, the Western military tradition encourages volunteerism: high-risk operations are very often staffed by volunteers or special forces.

Jesus was speaking to His disciples in their capacity as church members. He was not speaking to a group of soldiers. The principle

3. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 20.

4. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), chaps. 3, 4.

of leadership that He laid down here is not appropriate for the army, whose task, as an aphorism put it, is "to kill people and break things." Leaders in the church are supposed to be servants, not military commanders. The proper pathway to authority in the church is the way of service. Paul made this clear in his first epistle to Timothy. "A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity" (I Tim. 3:2–4).[5] The person described here is self-sacrificing.

That this is the avenue to ecclesiastical authority is not intuitively obvious. The exercise of power is the more common avenue to public greatness. The strong man compels obedience. He also rewards it. He governs by means of sanctions, positive and negative.

But how is this different from authority in the church? The distinction is not easy to state. For example, we can say that the way to authority in the church is through service to those without any power, but this is not true in a church where members vote. The members have sanctions to impose. They vote to hire or fire a pastor. They vote for officers. If a man's goal is high office, the favor of those possessing these sanctions is surely valuable to him. Similarly, in the worldly quest for power, men serve those who possess greater power. They subordinate themselves to those who can reward them. But church members who vote can also reward others with leadership positions. Those seeking authority do subordinate themselves to those with the votes. Where, then, is the distinction between church authority and other forms of authority? What did Jesus mean when He said, "But it shall not be so among you"?

1. Service Unto Death

Christ's personal service was service unto death. He did not die to placate men. He died to placate God.

Service in the church is to be analogous. *The legitimate road to dominion is through service to those who cannot repay*. God will raise up such a servant to a position of leadership. Yet, in the modern church where members vote, almost everyone can repay. This is also true in civil government. To understand what Jesus was getting at, we must consider His era.

5. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 4.

In the gentile world in Jesus' day, democracy was a relic of the past. Rome had moved from a republic to an empire under Caesar Augustus in the generation before Jesus' birth. The trappings of representative government were still visible, but not the substance. To gain and hold power, men had to seek favor with members of the oligarchy that held permanent power. The people could not grant political office or withhold it from those above them. There was no public veto over the affairs of state. Power was granted from above.

2. Ecclesiastical Office

When it came time to replace Judas, the 11 apostles made the decision regarding who would be the two candidates. Then they turned it over to God. "And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles" (Acts 1:23–26). On what basis did the apostles narrow the list of candidates? The text does not say, but we know what it was from Jesus' words: those in authority decided in terms of the service displayed by the two men. The standard was not service to the apostles, but service to the congregation.

Those with power in the church should heed Christ's words. They should use service to others as the criterion for screening the candidates for high office. It is clear from the passage in Acts that democracy was not part of their screening procedure. They could lawfully use the casting of lots to allow God to make the final decision. This practice had to be replaced in A.D. 70: the fall of Jerusalem, when judicially authoritative divine revelation ceased.

Then to what extent is Acts a legitimate model for today? Hierarchy has not been annulled. How do Jesus' words apply to church hierarchy? First, there must be a screening procedure. The standard of service to others must be applied by those who are not being served. The screening committee must not become self-serving or self-perpetuating. It must not choose its successors based on service to the personal interests of members of the hierarchy. Committee members must be able to perceive that a potential candidate is active in his service to the members.

Second, there must be more than one candidate for each office. The screening committee can and must apply the criteria, but it must not assume that only one person is capable of holding office. This assumes too much wisdom on the part of a committee. Committees are rarely creative. They function best as nay-sayers. They veto bad ideas. They should decide only what things in general should be done and not done, and to hire and fire the senior officer. Implementation must be left to individuals who answer to the committee.

Third, there must be third-party sanctions. Someone other than the screening committee must have the final decision. In the case in Acts, God was the third party. To lodge final authority in the representative body is to create an implicit tyranny. *Representatives should always face a veto by those represented*. As in the case of a committee, the larger association that comprises those who are represented cannot both devise and implement specific policies. They cooperate with each other in a joint structuring of general goals. Then they choose a manager who will implement these general goals in specific instances. But they cannot escape responsibility before God. If their leaders fall, they fall (Lev. 4).[6]

The gentiles served those above them. Obedience to an ever-more narrow hierarchy was the way to power. Rulership was a matter of coercion: issuing orders to those below. The authority to issue orders was seen as the great prize. Jesus announced a different system of hierarchy: the principle of servanthood. Instead of issuing orders to those beneath him, the ruler is to serve them. Coercion is thereby minimized.

B. Servants' Rights

Men pervert this rule when they seek leadership roles by serving only those who can repay them with the robes of authority. They imitate rebellious Absalom, who stood in the city's gates and promised justice to all men.[7] They pretend to serve. They flatter those ostensibly

6. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 4.

7. "And Absalom rose up early, and stood beside the way of the gate: and it was so, that when any man that had a controversy came to the king for judgment, then Absalom called unto him, and said, Of what city art thou? And he said, Thy servant is of one of the tribes of Israel. And Absalom said unto him, See, thy matters are good and right; but there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee. Absalom said moreover, Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice! And it was so, that when any man came nigh to him to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand, and took him, and kissed him. And on this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king for judgment: so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel" (II Sam. 15:2–6).

served in a strategy to gain the power to issue orders. They become cortiers to the crowd.[8]

How can those being served protect themselves? First, by not consenting to a system of centralized administrative law. They must keep church government weak. All government is a system of hierarchy, but the biblical model for church and state (but not family) is a bottom-up hierarchy. Rulers are judges who hear disputes (Ex. 18).[9] They are to honor biblical law, including Mosaic case laws that have not been annulled by the New Testament.[10] Court decisions become precedents. But the common law ideal of judges-made law (the many) is as anti-biblical as the Roman law ideal of legislature-made law (the one). Both views make man the law-giver. Neither can reconcile the one and the many. Biblical law does.

Second, those served must exercise judicial sanctions from time to time. They must decide who will rule over them. In doing so, they exercise a veto over the decisions of the representative body, either directly or indirectly.

Third, members must decide whether to remain in covenant with a local congregation. Competition among congregations is as good a thing as competition among candidates for church office. Servants should be allowed to vote with their feet. Original sin teaches that men cannot be trusted with unilateral power. If power is exercised only downward, the result is tyranny. If a self-appointing hierarchy determines the distribution of the inheritance, those who provide the funding should reduce that inheritance by transferring their membership and their tithes.

C. Dominion Through Service: Free Market

The free market order is based on a principle of service analogous to the one that Jesus set forth as binding in the church. The producer must serve buyers if he wishes to maximize his return. He must act in the present as a representative of future buyers. He must forecast what they will be willing and able to pay in the future. Then he must enter the market for production goods. He must buy or rent them, store them, restructure them, store the finished products, advertise

8. Ray Eldon Hiebert, *Courtier to the Crowd: The Story of Ivy Lee and the Development of Public Relations* (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1966).

9. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 19.

10. *Ibid.*, Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990).

them, and deliver the to paying customers. If he misforecasts customer demand, he will produce losses. If he forecasts correctly, he will produce profits.[11]

What distinguishes this form of service from hierarchical authority is the horizontal nature of the relationship between buyer and seller. Each possesses legal sovereignty over his assets. Neither posses legal sovereignty over the other person or the other person's assets. *The economic relationship is horizontal*.

A customer is legally sovereign over his own money. He decides whether or not to buy an item offered for sale. The seller has no legal compulsion over him in a free market economy. The seller has a legal claim on his own products, but he does not have a legal claim on the customer's money. The seller of goods is legally sovereign over what he owns, just as the customer is legally sovereign over what he owns. But the customer is dominant. Why? Because he possesses the most marketable asset: money. The seller owns a specialized asset. It has a much narrower market. There are far fewer people rushing to give him money in exchange for his asset than there are sellers who are pursuing customers for their money. The customers, because they own money, are economically dominant.

In rare instances, the producer is dominant. These cases usually are unique life-and-death situations. The physician at the scene of an accident is dominant over a critically injured person. The injured person is not in a position to negotiate. But such cases are exceptions, and juries in disputes over payment possess the authority to overturn the terms of the verbal contract on behalf of the buyer. The general market principle is this: *customers are economically dominant over producers*. While both parties are buyers and both are sellers, he who sells money is considered the buyer. He is economically dominant because he owns the most marketable commodity.

To maximize their returns, sellers must conform to the demand established by buyers. The legal structure of the free market is not a pyramid-like hierarchy. *Sellers and buyers meet on equal legal terms: as owners of marketable assets*. Neither is legally sovereign over the other. Neither can compel the other to meet his demands. The only negative sanction that either of them can impose on the other is the refusal to enter into an exchange. The free market is therefore not a covenantal institution.

11. Frank H. Knight, *Risk, Uncertainty, and Profit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1921).

1. Covenant vs. Market

In a covenantal institution, there is a hierarchy of legal authority. Subordinates take an oath before God that they will defer to the decisions of ordained superiors. They owe them allegiance, for they owe God allegiance, and their superiors represent them before God (Lev. 4).[12] The superior has a legal claim on his subordinates.

This is not the legal relationship between buyers and sellers in a free market economy. Any attempt to insert the legal structure of a covenant into market relationships undermines the authority of money-owning customers. Other would-be customers, who do not possess sufficient money, or who wish to use their money for other purposes, sometimes call for the state to redistribute wealth. They sometimes call on the state to compel producers to meet their demand at below-market prices by legally forbidding the bids of competing customers. The substitution of one party's legal sovereignty over mutual exchange undermines the economic authority of buyers in general.

Legislation favoring certain groups is introduced and passed on the basis of a deception. The public is told that the legislation protects an entire group, when it really favors one segment of this group at the expense of most of the other members of the community. A politically successful segment of the larger population gains protection by law from competition from other segments. Above-market economic returns are legislated for the benefit of a subgroup. The higher these returns, the fewer the beneficiaries: fewer participants to share the wealth.

Consider legislation passed in the name of producers' sovereignty: tariffs, import quotas, cartels, quality controls, price floors, compulsory trade union laws, and licensing. Or consider legislation passed in the name of customers' sovereignty: price ceilings, quality controls, laws barring racial discrimination in renting or selling, and rationing. All such legislation annuls the legal sovereignty of *excluded* producers and customers over their own property. It forcibly removes them from the competitive bidding process. In doing so, it restricts the market, thereby lowering the division of labor and reducing output per unit of resource input. It reduces the wealth of those discriminated against, all in the name of the public interest. In the name of a "government-business partnership," it revokes the legal sovereignty of politically unskilled producers. In the name of "consumerism," it revokes the legal sovereignty of politically unskilled buyers.

12. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 4.

Conclusion

The principle of top-down hierarchical service by rulers governs the three institutional covenants: ecclesiastical, familial, and civil. A covenant is bound by an oath to God, implicit or explicit. It involves legal claims. Where hierarchy is covenantal, rulers are to seek dominion by serving the needs of their subordinates. God honors those with the power to enforce their will on others when they restrain themselves and sacrifice their own interests for the sake of their subordinates. This is what Jesus did in both of His offices: God and man.

This rule governs all men: "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Phil. 2:3–4).[13] But it especially governs those rulers who have been entrusted with delegated authority from God and man. The structure of authority is vertical.

Free market authority is contractual, not covenantal. A contract is not established by a formal oath before God. It is established through voluntary mutual agreement. The customer is supreme in the free market. This is because he owns the most marketable commodity: money. Producers must serve customers. *The structure of service is horizontal because the free market is not a covenantal institution*. It is an extension of the individual. The individual who produces something for sale to others must serve their desires. The principle of service to others governs the free market. Individuals serve each other through mutually beneficial exchange. This is not hierarchy except in the general economic sense that the customer is dominant because he possesses the most marketable commodity, money.

13. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 19.

13

FORFEITING POSSESSIONS[1]

> *And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother. And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth. Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.*
>
> MARK 10:17–22

This is commonly referred to as the story of the rich young ruler. He was young (Matt. 19:20). He was a ruler (Luke 18:18).

The theocentric principle here was the price entry into the kingdom of heaven: sanctions, point four of the biblical covenant.[2]

A. Access to Eternal Life

God has established standards of entry into His kingdom. The Ten Commandments are the summary of these standards, Jesus told the enquirer. But there is another barrier to entry: faith in God rather than faith in riches. The section prior to the story of the rich young ruler in Matthew's account deals with the same theme: entry into the

1. Adapted from Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch 38.

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

kingdom. Men must become as little children, Jesus said.[3] That is, they must trust God with the same confidence that a child trusts his father. In His answer to the enquirer, Jesus amplified this principle. Those who trust in money have transgressed one of the standards of entry. They have substituted a rival faith.

The young man was a ruler (Luke 18:18). He understood something of the doctrine of the resurrection. He sought eternal life. Jesus then referred to the kingdom of heaven. The entry into eternal life takes place in history. The kingdom of heaven must have manifestations in history. What men do or fail to do in history, Christ implied, determines their inheritance.

Can men earn their way into heaven? The young man thought so: he had kept the commandments. Jesus showed him that he had more to do: sell his goods and give them to the poor. But this seems to make access to heaven a matter of good works. He implied that the young man had not done enough by keeping the commandments. He had to do more. Taken at face value, this passage teaches works religion: man can earn his salvation. Such a view of salvation is antithetical to biblical religion. Then why did Jesus not verbally challenge the man to rethink his religion? Why did He imply that the man could buy his way into heaven? Why did He tell the man to give away his money to the poor? Was this what is always required of those who would follow Jesus?

B. Trust Not in Riches

Rich men do not enter God's kingdom, Jesus said. "And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!" (Mark 10:24). David had said something similar a thousand years earlier: "Wherefore should I fear in the days of evil, when the iniquity of my heels shall compass me about? They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him" (Ps. 49:5–7).[4]

Jesus returned to this theme repeatedly in His parables and His

3. "Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven. And he laid his hands on them, and departed thence" (Matt. 19:13–15).

4. Gary North, *Confidence and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Psalms* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 9.

dealings with rich men. Solomon had, too. "The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit" (Prov. 18:11).[5] The rich man trusts in his power to get wealth. He trusts in the creation. Moses warned against this: "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth" (Deut. 8:17).[6] It is the sin of autonomy. It is the belief that man is the primary source of wealth.[7] It is also the belief that this wealth is the coin of the realm in God's kingdom. But it isn't. "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:36–37).[8]

The lure of wealth is a powerful lure. Wealth seems to offer the ability to buy the good things of life. Money is the most marketable commodity. It seems to be a surrogate for wealth. This outlook proclaims: "Anything can be bought; every man has his price." Jesus warned that this is a false premise. So did David: "For the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth for ever" (Ps. 49:8).

The enquirer had not understood Jesus' warning about the worship of God rather than mammon. "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24).[9] The enquirer had not examined his own soul. He had not seen clearly regarding his faith. He still trusted in his riches.

What did his wealth buy him that was worth access to God's kingdom? Wealth can buy many things: luxury, safety, fame, deference by others. But all of these are as fleeting as riches. Remove the wealth, and everything that wealth had bought disappears. Mammon is a fickle god. It leaves without warning, taking with it all that it had previously distributed.

C. Give to the Poor

"If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow

5. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 54.

6. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 21.

7. Julian Simon, *The Ultimate Resource* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981).

8. Chapter 11.

9. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 14.

me" (Matt. 19:21). Jesus called this would-be disciple to a complete rejection of his former way of life. Why? Does He call all men to the same rejection? If not, why not?

He told the man to sell his wealth and give the money to the poor. But, to do this, he had to sell his goods to someone. His wealth was not to be burnt on a pyre; it was to be exchanged for a more liquid asset: money. Money can be handed out in discrete units, a little at a time. The rich man was to learn how to give money away. Then he was to follow Jesus—not before.

This was a two-fold transfer of wealth: to those who bought it for money and to those who received the money. The rich young ruler was to become a middleman in the transfer of wealth. The more money he received from the sale of his wealth, the more money he could give away. He was to negotiate a top price from the buyers, and he was then to become a wise giver. He was to become more skilled as an administrator of capital. He was to put it to better use: service to God.

Others were allowed to buy his wealth. Did this mean that Jesus was condemning the buyers to eternal torment? Is wealth illegitimate? No. "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13:22).[10] The question, then, is the context in which the wealth is held: man's or God's. *The theological issue is theonomy vs. autonomy*. To whose use is the wealth to be put? Does the owner see himself as a steward of God?

The rich young ruler had a problem. He was at a turning point in his life. So was Old Covenant Israel. His wealth was held by means of a legal framework. He was under the authority of Rome. So was Old Covenant Israel. His wealth was no safer than this hierarchy. A generation later, Rome would crush Israel's political revolt. Most wealth owned by Jews would be destroyed by war and their subsequent dispersion by Rome. Unless he died young, he lived to see this great destruction of wealth. Mammon cannot be safely trusted.

The young man was beguiled by his possessions. Jesus offered him a pathway to clarity regarding his priorities, but he went away troubled.

Jesus asked him to become poor. Wandering around Judea with a group of unemployed disciples was not a way of life preferred by most rich men. Matthew-Levi was an exception, but there were not many. Jesus called the young man into poverty as a way into the kingdom of God. This man's priorities were arranged differently from

10. North, *Wisdom and Dominion*, ch. 41.

those required for faithful service in an era of definitive covenantal transition. He did not understand the times.

D. Hierarchies of Faith

After this confrontation, we read the following.

> And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved? And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible (Mark 10:23–27).

This indicates that a rich man is rare in the kingdom of heaven. The disciples replied: "Who then can be saved? And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible." Why did they ask this? There are few rich people in any population; Pareto's wealth-distribution curve assures this. If it did not, the bell-shaped curve would. Jesus said more than once, "many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt. 20:16;[11] 22:14). This was not a startling doctrine for Jews. (There were no gentiles in the kingdom during Jesus' ministry.) Why should the disciples ask, "Who then can be saved?" Just because a rich man cannot be saved, why should this raise any question about most men?

Jews expected victory in history. They did not believe they would be under foreign domination forever. They had read Deuteronomy 28:

> Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store. Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out. The LORD shall cause thine enemies that rise up against thee to be smitten before thy face: they shall come out against thee one way, and flee before thee seven ways. The LORD shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. The LORD shall establish thee an holy people unto himself, as he hath sworn unto thee, if thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, and walk in his ways (Deut. 28:4–9).[12]

11. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 40.
12. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 69.

They expected earthly rewards at some future time. "For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth" (Ps. 37:9). Yet here was Jesus telling them that these blessings would constitute a threat to Israel's salvation. How could this be?

Jesus answered that with God, all things are possible. That is, such salvation is abnormal but possible. Jesus' point was clear: *wealth is a great temptation*. Those who get wealthy risk being snared by the doctrine of autonomy. The Old Covenant warned the rich man not to take advantage of the poor or to imagine that he was beyond the circumstances that afflict them.

Jesus' answer indicated that wealth is a snare. Proverbs had said the same thing. "Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain" (Prov. 30:8–9).[13]

The lure of autonomy is strong. Those who possess any special advantage that provides them with a barrier against life's common burdens are tempted to regard themselves as beyond God's negative sanctions. These advantages include wealth, power, beauty, and health. But wealth is the most universally sought-after advantage, for it offers the broadest range of immunities from the common burdens of life. Of course, it adds new burdens. With an increase in the number of choices (wealth) comes an increase in responsibility (Luke 12:47–48).[14]

The message is clear: we should not expect to see many rich people subordinating themselves to God through the gospel. The rich are not willing to pay the price, namely, a transfer of their faith from wealth to Christ. Wealth seems to be under their control; Christ isn't. Wealth extends their power; faith in Christ extends God's dominion. They appear to be at the top of a hierarchy of wealth; not so with the kingdom of God. The rich man prefers to be at the top.

E. Continuity and Discontinuity in Jesus' Teachings

Jesus did not break with the Old Covenant's view of wealth and its inherent risks. *What made His teaching different was His lack of emphasis on the covenantal basis of corporate wealth*. There is not much in His teaching about the relationship between covenant-keeping and a so-

13. North, *Wisdom and Dominion*, ch. 85.

14. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

ciety's accumulation of wealth. There are only occasional reconfirmations of the Old Covenant's system of corporate sanctions. "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5).[15] This cites Psalm 37:11: "But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace." *Jesus placed most of His emphasis on the idea of wealth as a snare to the individual rather than as a tool of dominion*. There is no doubt that this New Testament emphasis overwhelmingly promotes the idea of great wealth as a risk to the soul.

There is nothing in the New Testament that indicates that economic growth as a goal for society is wrong. There is nothing wrong with reducing the number of poor people by increasing their productivity. Capital accumulation increases men's productivity. Better tools make men more productive. Personal thrift increases capital accumulation. Men have discovered no better way to increase the supply of capital than to allow investors to reap the fruits of their investments. The goal of greater personal wealth is the lure that increases per capita investment in a society. That which is dangerous to the soul—the quest for wealth—is also what reduces the number of poor as well as their degree of poverty. Not charity but thrift and wise investing are the secret of reduced poverty in society. *This crucial fact is not taught in the New Testament*. It is implied in the Old Testament, however, which teaches the legal and moral right of private ownership and the legitimacy of wealth. When widely obeyed, the legal framework of the Mosaic Covenant necessarily produces a capitalistic social order.[16]

There are those who argue that Jesus did not adopt Old Testament standards. In fact, most Christians affirm this. But they affirm it selectively. At some point, they are forced to admit that sometimes He assumed the continuity of Mosaic standards. For example, conservatives[17] insist that Jesus was not opposed to the free market, and was even favorable to it. Yet they also insist that He did not affirm a theocratic system of civil government, or any other political system. Liberals[18] insist that He opposed both the free market and theocratic civil government. Trapped between the two are pietistic Christians who say that Jesus was indifferent to social issues; He was concerned only with personal salvation. They can appeal to the obvious fact

15. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 4.

16. I have written 17 volumes on the economics of the Pentateuch that prove this point. It is the responsibility of critics of my thesis to produce something comparable that proves otherwise.

17. Those in the Scottish Whig tradition by way of Edmund Burke.

18. Those in the French Revolutionary tradition.

that He was as silent on the free market social order as He was on theocratic civil government. Why this silence? Because He implicitly accepted both? Because He implicitly opposed both? Because He implicitly accepted one but not the other? Or because He was indifferent to both?

Theonomists assume covenantal continuity in the absence of specific annulments or a change based on the end of Israel's status as the Promised Land of the priestly nation.[19] So, theonomists insist that Jesus accepted both the free market and theocratic civil government, since the Mosaic Covenant mandated both, and there is nothing in the New Covenant that annuls either institutional arrangement. He did not break with Moses on either point. His emphasis on the spiritual danger of wealth also did not break with Moses. He just skipped over the legacy of the Old Covenant that affirmed the legitimacy of great wealth, with Abraham and Job as leading examples. This was a matter of emphasis. The emphases of the two testaments are different. This does not mean that the testaments are in opposition.

The *personal* economic goal recommended by the Old Testament was middle-class wealth (Prov. 30:7–9).[20] There is nothing in the New Testament that would call this goal into question. Paul wrote, citing the account of the manna (Ex. 16:18): "As it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack" (II Cor. 8:15).[21] But in a world without manna from heaven, output sufficient to fill most men's stomachs will make some men rich. Like the poor, Pareto's curve is with us always. Output sufficient to feed all men will make some men very rich. The question is: What will these rich men do with their wealth? Share it? Accumulate more of it? The rich young ruler had his answer straight from Jesus. He went away troubled.

F. Jesus' Recommended Priorities

The rich young ruler had a problem with the content of his faith. He trusted in what he thought he could do and had always done: keep all of God's commandments. Jesus showed him that his faith was in himself and therefore defective. His faith was leading him to eternal

19. Seed laws, land laws, and priestly laws. See Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), Conclusion.

20. North, *Wisdom and Dominion*, ch. 85.

21. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 6.

death. His law-keeping and his wealth had become his high walls. By challenging him to tear down the second of these two walls, Jesus forced him to reconsider the content of his faith. His problem was not his good works or his wealth; his problem was his belief in the spiritual efficacy of works religion. He could not earn eternal life.

To show to him how wrong he was, Jesus went to the heart of his faith: his wealth. He was a follower of mammon. What he had to do in order to gain eternal life was beyond his ability. What all men have to do to gain eternal life is beyond their ability. It is the task of the evangelist to identify whatever it is that an anxious enquirer cannot do or will not do for the sake of the prize: the good work that is just too much for him, the wall that he cannot climb over. The evangelist must then confront the enquirer with the existence of this wall, which is a barrier in between him and the eternal prize. Then the enquirer may be ready to hear the correct answer: "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matt. 16:24). How does a man deny himself? By affirming faith in Jesus Christ, as Paul and Silas told the Philippian jailer: "And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (Acts 16:31).

Jesus placed the attainment of personal wealth very low on any man's list of priorities—far lower than generosity to the poor. He did not place per capita economic growth high on the list. He did not place it on the list at all. The second point follows from the first, for without men's willingness to save in their quest for wealth, there can be no widespread reduction in poverty: insufficient per capita capital. Jesus also did not place the elimination of poverty on the list. The third point follows from the first two. He emphasized personal charity, which ameliorates individual cases of poverty, but does not solve the problem of widespread poverty. Only economic growth does this, but economic growth is the product of widespread personal wealth-seeking: thrift. Many religions emphasize charity, but only in the West, where Christianity and especially Calvinist theology had its roots, has a two centuries-long period of compound economic growth occurred. Whether this can continue in the face of widespread apostasy, increasing debauchery, and legalized abortion remains to be seen.

Conclusion

Compared to eternal life, economic growth is a pale sanction indeed. But this does not deny the legitimacy of economic growth. It need not be a negative sanction. John Wesley's refrain is valid: "Gain all you can. Save all you can. Give all you can."[22] It was this outlook that moved Methodists out of grinding poverty into middle-class respectability—and theological liberalism—in less than two centuries. The history of the twentieth century mainline denominations in the United States is evidence of the truth of Christ's warning to the rich young ruler. Better to be a Methodist layman in a wretched hut in 1740 than a Methodist theologian in a wretched seminary in the early twenty-first century.

The economic goal of both testaments is the same: middle-class comfort for the masses. This takes generations of compound economic growth. It was not achieved in any society until the twentieth century, during which Western Christianity went into spiritual decline. Like the poor, the rich we shall always have with us. But if the way to riches is by serving buyers, as it is under free market capitalism, the more rich people we have, the less grinding is the poverty of the poor. The problem is, when the poor have become less poor because entrepreneurs have been allowed to get exceedingly rich, both rich and poor can fall into the trap: "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth."

The modern pietistic Protestant hymn is correct: "I'd rather have Jesus than silver and gold." But the theonomists' goal is better: "I'd rather have Jesus *and* silver and gold." So far, no society has achieved this. It takes widespread conversions and obedience to biblical law.

22. Sermon 50 (1744): *The Use of Money*.

14

HUNDREDFOLD INHERITANCE[1]

> *Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee. And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life. But many that are first shall be last; and the last first.*
>
> MARK 10:28–31

The theocentric focus of this passage was inheritance: point five of the biblical covenant.[2]

A. Status: Thrones of Judgment

Peter's question was in response to Jesus' warning about how few rich men will enter the kingdom of heaven. Peter reminded Him that he and the other disciples had forsaken all, which included their families. They were not rich. He asked: "What's in it for us?" He was looking for assurance of a positive sanction. Christ promised two. *First*, they would exercise authority. In Luke, we are given another account of this same promise. It relates to the meaning of the Lord's Supper. "Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto

1. Adapted from Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 39.

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 5.

me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:28–30). What did this mean? Why was this related to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper? The link was sanctions. The Lord's Supper is a sacrament of judgment: self-judgment, church judgment, and God's judgment.[3] *Second*, they would gain the kingdom. The Jews would lose it, He told them. "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43). Old Covenant Israel was coming to the end of the road. The church was about to inherit the kingdom-related promises of God. One aspect of this kingdom is the rendering of judgment. Jesus had already told them: "Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 18:18).

The apostles, by bringing the gospel of the kingdom to Israel, were bringing a covenant lawsuit against Israel. Like the prophets before them, they would suffer persecution by the Jews because of this covenant lawsuit. "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matt. 5:11–12). These were negative sanctions.

This was not what Peter wanted to hear. What about the positive sanctions? Jesus told them that they would be agents of judgment against Israel. They would bring judgment against the Jews, who were bringing judgment against them. How would they do this? He did not say. He did not promise them that they would do this in heaven. This may have been His frame of reference, but then they would all have to die before the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, when judgment arrived.[4] Jesus may have had in mind their preaching of the kingdom. This would be a means of bringing judgment. What He did say is that they would participate with Him in the rendering of judgment against the 12 tribes. The dozen apostles (minus Judas, plus Matthias) would replace the dozen tribes of Israel.[5] They would

3. "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep" (I Cor. 11:28–30).

4. David Chilton, *The Great Tribulation* (Tyler, Texas: Dominion Press, [1987] 1997).

5. Levi, the priestly tribe, was replaced by the church. The priesthood ceased: no more animal sacrifices.

serve judicially as representative agents of the New Israel of God, the church.[6]

This was a major blessing. They would become the patriarchs of a new Israel. They would become founders, not in the sense of biology, but rather as forefathers. Their names would extend down through the ages.[7] So few people are remembered in history that becoming part of the historical record of a civilization is generally regarded as a great honor. Fame ranks with money and power in the minds of most people: the desire not to be forgotten. Wealth is far easier to achieve than fame.

B. Inheritance: Multiplication

Exercising authority would be one positive sanction. Second, "every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life" (Matt. 19:29). They would receive a hundredfold. This is an image of great wealth.

What had they forfeited? Above all, their families. Also listed is land. This was the context of the promise of a hundredfold increase. This is confusing. If they paid for their time spent with Jesus by losing contact with their families, or possibly losing the trust of their families, how could they be repaid a hundredfold? With money? How much money? How can anyone place a market value on lost family life? In any case, what income? Not monetary income from wandering the roads of Judea.

The context indicates the multiplication of families. The apostles had lost those things closely associated with family life. They would gain access to a new family inheritance. Their efforts in spreading the gospel of the kingdom would lead to a new family: the family of God. *A new era of mass adoption by God was at hand*. The founders of the church would be welcomed into households everywhere. They would become founders of a new family, a family analogous to the family of Old Covenant Israel.

They would be involved in the burial of the old family of God. Israel's inheritance would come to them as the nearest of kin. "And if

6. "And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16).

7. "Simon, (whom he also named Peter,) and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called Zelotes, And Judas the brother of James, and Judas Iscariot, which also was the traitor" (Luke 6:14–16). "And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles" (Acts 1:26).

his father have no brethren, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his kinsman that is next to him of his family, and he shall possess it: and it shall be unto the children of Israel a statute of judgment, as the LORD commanded Moses" (Num. 27:11). Old Covenant Israel would die without leaving biological heirs. The covenantal heirs would inherit.

The inheritance of Old Covenant Israel would soon pass to the church. The patriarchs of the church would become heirs of all of Israel's promises. Through them, this inheritance would pass to the adopted children of God. The agents of this adoption were the apostles. *They would receive the inheritance of Israel as trustees*.

This did not necessarily mean that they would receive the inheritance in history. The language of their judging Israel on thrones of glory pointed to the opposite: their deaths, one by one, prior to the fall of Jerusalem. But inheritance is covenantal. It is *inheritance by confession*. Their confessional heirs would inherit the promises. In this sense, the apostles would inherit in the name of their heirs. They would inherit definitively in history, though not finally.

C. The First Shall Be Last

"But many that are first shall be last; and the last be first" (v. 31). This cryptic statement appears repeatedly in Matthew's gospel. It is quoted by Christians far more widely than it is understood. At least two very different interpretations are possible, given the context of this passage. One flows from what Jesus had just said. The other makes sense because of what Jesus would say next.

The immediately preceding context indicates that Jesus was talking about the apostles. Peter had asked the question: "What shall we have" (Matt. 19:27)? The question regarding Jesus' discussion of first and last is this: In relation to whom, future converts to the faith or the Jews? Which did Jesus have in mind? I will examine both possibilities.

As in English, "first" and "last" in Greek can refer to either status or sequence. I will examine both possibilities.

1. The Apostles and Future Converts

The context of Jesus' statement reflects both interpretations of "first" and "last": status and inheritance. Jesus had spoken to them of judging on 12 thrones: judicial status. He had also spoken of a hundredfold inheritance. The preceding context—though not the subsequent context—indicates that He was speaking of their personal

futures, not the future of Christians in general. But was He? It is possible to make a case for such a corporate view.

Consider "first" and "last" in terms of status. "But many that are first [in status] shall be last [in status]; and the last [in status] shall be first [in status]" (Matt. 19:30). This makes no sense. The apostles would judge Israel. This meant that they would be first in status. They would occupy 12 thrones "when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory" (Matt. 19:28). Taken literally, this means that they would die prior to the fall of Jerusalem. James was executed in A.D. 62.[8] We do not know about the others. Tradition says that John survived until the 90s, but this is based on a late dating of the Book of Revelation. This late dating is difficult to defend. The book was probably written in A.D. 64 or 65.[9]

Consider "first" and "last" in terms of inheritance. "But many that are first [to inherit] shall be last [to inherit]; and the last [to inherit] shall be first [to inherit]." This also makes no sense. Those who died before Jerusalem fell in A.D. 70 would not see their inheritance in history. Those who came later would receive the visible inheritance, yet they were not the first to inherit. The apostles were first. Jesus said so. This was their reward for following Him. This was His answer to Peter's question.

What about a combination of status and inheritance? "But many that are first [in status] shall be last [to inherit]; and the last [in status] shall be first [to inherit]." The apostles were clearly first in status. This was their reward for being the first to forsake all and follow Jesus. But to exercise this honor as judges on thrones, they would either have to die prior to the fall of Jerusalem—heavenly thrones, which seems likely—or perish in the terrible crisis, or escape it by fleeing the city. The first view is more likely: rendering final judgment against Old Covenant Israel from heaven. They would not be the historical recipients of the final inheritance. Rather, they would administer it from heaven. Conversely, the first to receive Israel's covenantal inheritance—those Christians who survived Jerusalem's Great Tribulation in A.D. 70[10]—would be last in status. They would become the forgotten generation.

So it was. Nothing written survives of the generation immediately following the fall of Jerusalem: the generation that inherited. The ear-

8. Carsten Peter Thiede and Matthew D'Ancona, *Eyewitness to Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), p. 47. They cite Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XX:197–203.

9. Kenneth L. Gentry, *Before Jerusalem Fell: The Date of Revelation* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989).

10. Chilton, *Great Tribulation*.

liest surviving writings of the early church are thought to be from the period of the 90s, over two decades after the fall of Jerusalem. *There would be no remembrance for members of the first generation who inherited*. All we know is that the church survived the Roman wars in Palestine. Church history records that the Jerusalem church fled to the town of Pella, a gentile city, but this information comes from Eusebius, who wrote in A.D. 325.[11] We know almost nothing about the church in the period of the final inheritance.

Inheritance, like sanctification,[12] is definitive, progressive, and final. The apostles received the definitive inheritance. Christ promised it to them. Their work for a generation in bringing the covenant lawsuit against Israel served as the legal basis of the transfer of the inheritance from Israel to the church. This was a progressive inheritance. It took a generation. It involved a war between the false heirs and the true heirs. When the persecutions began, the Jerusalem church fled; only the apostles remained behind to proclaim the covenant lawsuit (Acts 8:1). The apostles died before the final transfer was visible. *They were first in inheriting but last in receiving*. They were like the three patriarchs of Israel and the sons of Jacob: the promise of inheritance in the land had come definitively to Abraham, but none of them lived to see it.

This interpretation places the hundredfold inheritance in the possession of the apostles—an inheritance exercised by faith, not by sight. They became the church's forefathers. This was their reward, along with the reward of sitting on 12 thrones. But if we restrict this promise of hundredfold inheritance to the apostles, this does not answer the question of the inheritance for Christians throughout history. Are we not also participants in the great inheritance? Surely we all "shall inherit everlasting life." Why not also the inheritance? The second interpretation broadens this inheritance.

2. The Apostles and Israel

The second interpretation makes sense in the light of what Jesus said in Matthew's exposition: "So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen" (Matt. 20:16). In the parable of the householder who goes into the public square to hire workers

11. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book III, Chap. V.

12. John Murray, "Sanctification," *The Collected Works of John Murray*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), II, p. 277. Cf. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 10:A:2.

throughout the day, paying them all a penny per day, the contrast is between the group that worked all day and those groups that arrived throughout the day. The earliest workers complained to the employer that he had made the late-comers equal to them, even though the former had worked the whole day. They thought they deserved more, since they had worked longer.[13] The context of the parable indicates that the complainers were the Jews. Jesus was prophesying that they would resent the fact that God was about to make an offer to the gentiles: equal access to the New Covenant kingdom and also equal payment at the end of the kingdom in history, i.e., eternal life. The Jews would not be given any special consideration in the kingdom for their years of prior service. Furthermore, entrance into heaven would not be based on years of service.

If Jesus' statement here of the first-last dichotomy is interpreted in terms of the next parable in Matthew, then the comparison is not between the apostles and future converts, but between the apostles and members of *Old Covenant Israel*, whom the apostles would judge in A.D. 70 from thrones in heaven. The "first" in this context is Old Covenant Israel. The "last" is the *predominantly gentile church*, which was represented judicially by the apostles. The text would therefore read: "But many that are [chronologically] first [Israel] shall be last [to enter the New Covenant kingdom]; and the last [the church] shall be first [to enter the New Covenant kingdom]."

Most Jews, hearing of this, would resent it. Jews had long regarded themselves as first in terms of status because they were chronologically first in terms of God's calling. But what they ignored was their history of rebellion, which would soon culminate in the crucifixion of Christ. Old Covenant Israel would continue to reject the message of the disciples. The nation would suffer the consequences. "And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city" (Matt. 10:14–15). "But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee" (Matt. 11:22–24).

13. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 40.

The inheritance here is the inheritance of the kingdom throughout history, not just in the first century. The Jews will remain as would-be heirs. They will inherit their share of the kingdom only by being grafted into the church (Rom. 11),[14] which grants access on the same terms, with the same rewards, to all men. They will enter the kingdom as lawful heirs, but they will enter last. They came into the Old Covenant church first, but this unique honor does not carry into the New Covenant. They would gain access to the kingdom as everyone else does: through the church.

3. A General Promise

Jesus told them, "every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life" (Matt. 19:29). This was not a promise to the apostles only, but to Christians in general. Their multiplication through time will encompass the whole earth. The church's progressive fulfillment of the Great Commission will extend the dominion covenant to the uttermost limits.[15]

The second interpretation—apostles (first) and Israel (last)—seems more consistent with this interpretation of the promise. *The promise is to every generation*. He who forsakes all to follow Christ is adopted into a confessional family. He gains his inheritance through his brethren. The division of labor increases as the body of Christ expands (Rom. 12;[16] I Cor. 12[17]). This increase in the division of labor increases every member's productivity and wealth, and also the wealth of those outside the church through common grace.[18] Even the covenant-breaking dogs under the table will feast on the abundance of crumbs. This is why Paul could write of the future conversion of the Jews: "I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy. Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles;

14. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 8.

15. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990).

16. North, *Cooperation and Dominion*, ch. 10.

17. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 15.

18. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987).

how much more their fulness?" (Rom. 11:11–12). When the gentile church achieves something worth being jealous of—the widespread extension of God's kingdom in history—the Jews will join.

Conclusion

The promise of multiplication had to do with inheritance. Whatever the apostles had already lost and would continue to lose as disciples of Christ, they would regain a hundredfold through their spiritual heirs. The church down through history constitutes their inheritance. They would have lost their inheritance anyway, had they remained loyal to Old Covenant Israel, whose time had come. The transfer of Israel's inheritance—the kingdom of God—was at hand. The apostles would become the original trustees in the transfer of the inheritance to their covenantal heirs. As forefathers, they would see their heirs and their heirs' wealth multiplied. They would see this in history only by the eyes of faith, just as Abraham had seen his inheritance.[19] But the transfer was as secure as Abraham's had been. They had Christ's word. They could safely trust Him.

This promise of inheritance extends to every generation. Adoption into the church brings every Christian into covenantal union with others of the same confession. Their inheritance is the whole earth.[20] This inheritance is open to everyone who follows Christ. The expansion of this inheritance is achieved through the extension of God's kingdom throughout history: the Great Commission.

This places top priority on the preaching of the gospel. The apostles' task is our task, too: to work for the multiplication of heirs through adoption by God. The task in proclaiming the gospel was two-fold, for the covenant's sanctions are two-fold: blessing and cursing, inheritance and disinheritance. The apostles would gain their inheritance through their covenantal heirs. This would require the disinheritance of Old Covenant Israel, which they would oversee from the 12 thrones.

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19. "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:8–10).

20. Gary North, *Inherit the Earth: Biblical Blueprints for Economics* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987).

15

JESUS' CLAIM OF OWNERSHIP

> *And when they came nigh to Jerusalem, unto Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount of Olives, he sendeth forth two of his disciples, And saith unto them, Go your way into the village over against you: and as soon as ye be entered into it, ye shall find a colt tied, whereon never man sat; loose him, and bring him. And if any man say unto you, Why do ye this? say ye that the Lord hath need of him; and straightway he will send him hither.*
>
> MARK 11:1–3

The theocentric principle here is Christ's ownership of the world in His capacity as the Son of God: point one of the biblical covenant.[1]

Jesus told His two disciples to borrow a colt without asking permission. Only if they were asked why they were taking the colt should they explain, He said. This was exactly what happened.

> And they went their way, and found the colt tied by the door without in a place where two ways met; and they loose him. And certain of them that stood there said unto them, What do ye, loosing the colt? And they said unto them even as Jesus had commanded: and they let them go (Mark 11:4–6).

The text does not say that the owner was among the group that asked the disciples what they were doing. In Luke, the text refers to these people as lords (Luke 19:33). This implies ownership, but it does not prove it.

Jesus was ready to have them remove the colt from its known location, even if the owner did not authorize the action. He knew what the chain of events will be. He knew there would be inquiries. But He

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 1.

added this information only after He had told them to take the colt. Furthermore, He added it as part of a conditional clause introduced by the word *if*. If no one asked them why they were taking the colt, the owner deserved no explanation.

Jesus was asserting ownership. He did the same thing when He overturned the tables of the moneychangers (Mark 11:15). Both acts would have been prohibited to someone who had no legal claim of ownership. He told the two disciples to have a ready answer for anyone who challenged them. "Say ye that the Lord hath need of him." He also made a prophecy: "Straightway he will send him hither." The fact that Jesus needed the colt was judicially sufficient to justify their consent. Anyone raising a question about their action would both understand and consent. This is exactly what took place.

He did not tell them to explain who the lord was who needed the colt. The implication was that God needed it. The Greek word *kurios* means *lord*. The same Greek word was used to describe the status of those who challenged the disciples (Luke 19:33). These lords recognized the superior claim that God had on this property.

On what legal basis did Jesus command His disciples to bring back the colt? On the basis of prophecy, which had legal standing in Israel. "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass" (Zech. 9:9). The Israelites of Jerusalem briefly honored this legal claim.

> And they brought the colt to Jesus, and cast their garments on him; and he sat upon him. And many spread their garments in the way: and others cut down branches off the trees, and strawed them in the way. And they that went before, and they that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest (Mark 11:7–10).

Conclusion

Jesus' command to His disciples was an affirmation of His kingship in Israel. Its legitimacy was understood by those who challenged the disciples when they obeyed Jesus' command and took the colt.

This passage should not be understood as biblical justification of unlimited authority over private property by civil government in general. It should be understood as a condemnation of Israel for having demanded a king to rule over them.

16

CASTING OUT THE MONEYCHANGERS[1]

> *And they come to Jerusalem: and Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves; And would not suffer that any man should carry any vessel through the temple. And he taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves.*
>
> MARK 11:15–17

The theocentric principle here was the holiness of God: boundaries, point three of the biblical covenant.[2]

A. Holy Housecleaning

This was the second time that Jesus performed this cleansing of the temple. The first time was during the week before the Passover, three years earlier. "And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise" (John 2:13–16). Here, He did it again. Liberals argue that the two

1. This is adapted from Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 42.

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 3.

accounts are scrambled chronologically. Conservatives argue that the priests were slow learners.

Jesus was not arrested either time. This is very strange. He clearly had violated other people's property rights. He had used force. He had entered a holy place and called the resident exchangers harsh names. By doing so, He was challenging those in charge of the temple. They had allowed this to go on. But what, exactly, was going on? Something that Jesus called theft. This was a very serious accusation. Yet the authorities did nothing. They did not formally accuse Jesus of being a false witness.

There was a reason: they were guilty as charged. But what were they guilty of? In John's account, He called them merchandisers. In Matthew's account, He called them thieves. Why was it theft to be a merchandiser? Why would Jesus have twice singled out those inside the temple as the objects of His wrath? Scripture gives no indication that He ever physically assaulted anyone else, yet He used a whip on these people the first time.

1. Holy Space

The temple was holy space: God's sanctuary. Inside its walls a higher ethical standard was to prevail. The closer that men came to the holy of holies, the greater the threat to them of their own moral pollution. God might bring sanctions against them. This is why the three families of Levi served as guardians of the temple, surrounding it in concentric circles (Num. 3; 4).[3]

When the merchants set up shop within the walls of the temple, they accepted greater responsibility for dealing righteously. They were not selling items in a market with open entry to competitors. Their merchandise had to meet high standards. The body of no blemished animal could lawfully be burned on the altar.[4] Thus, the animals sold for sacrifice had to be screened by the priests or their agents. To do this screening conveniently, the priests brought the merchants' tables inside the boundary of the temple.

One of the forms of sacrifice was a coin, the shekel. The temple originally had its own shekel.[5] It was the standard of weight and fineness for temple assessments. "This they shall give, every one that

3. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 3:C.

4. Leviticus 1:3; 3:1; 4:3, 23, etc.

5. Exodus 30:24; 38:24–26; Leviticus 5:15; Numbers 7.

passeth among them that are numbered, half a shekel after the shekel of the sanctuary: (a shekel is 20 gerahs:) an half shekel shall be the offering of the LORD" (Ex. 30:13). It was therefore unlawful to bring a coin from outside the temple unless it was of the same weight and fineness.

In Jesus' day, Jews came from around the Mediterranean to offer sacrifice. They brought many different kinds of coins. The Jews did not approve of coins with people's likenesses on them, especially the emperor's, which bore proclamations of his divinity.[6] During the Bar Kochba rebellion (A.D. 133–35), the Jews hammered out the images of the emperors on Roman coins and drew in scenes from the temple.[7] To bring a Roman coin to make an offering would have been a sacrilege. These coins had to be exchanged for temple coins.

2. False Dealing

This would have created opportunities for false dealing. The temple coins could have been sold at a premium beyond the weight and fineness of the coins' metals. It is likely that the moneychangers had been given a special dispensation by the priests. Moneychangers inside the walls of the temple would not have faced competition from rivals who were not authorized by temple authorities. Over decades and centuries, devious practices would have become common. The opportunity for above-market returns is always tempting and rarely resisted for long. Higher prices charged by the temple's moneychangers would have raised suspicion about the priests' collusion. To transfer the monopoly power to charge higher than open-entry prices is to transfer wealth. Those who possess such power are unlikely to transfer it free of charge. Once transferred, such a monopoly is difficult to revoke. Those who pay in advance for it expect to be compensated. They bid up the entry price on the basis of expected future income. They resist any attempt to lower the price unless they are offered refunds.[8]

Jesus identified their practices as theft. They were stealing from the faithful who came to offer sacrifice. They were also stealing from God. They were undermining His reputation. False weights and measures are an abomination to God. "But thou shalt have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure shalt thou have: that thy days

6. Ethelbert Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars: Historical Sketches* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), pp. 125–27.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 126.

8. This observation applies to all forms of licensing that require extra training or initial payment.

may be lengthened in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee" (Deut. 25:15).[9] "A false balance is abomination to the LORD: but a just weight is his delight" (Prov. 11:1).[10] The misuse of a monopoly granted in God's name was the judicial equivalent of false weights.

The priests had betrayed the trust of the nation by delegating authority over exchange rates to profit-seeking men. They had imposed false weights and measures. Jesus overturned their tables in the name of God. God was trustworthy; the moneychangers and priests were not. Jesus, as God's Sin, was trustworthy.

The priests did not prosecute Jesus. Why not? The most obvious reason is that they were in collusion with the merchants who were extracting monopoly returns.

B. Who Owned the Temple?

Jesus asserted that He was the Son of the Owner. In Matthew's account, Jesus cited an Old Testament passage: "It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer;[11] but ye have made it a den of thieves."[12] But, in John's account, He made a claim: "Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise" (John 2:16). He was the true heir. He was coming on behalf of the Owner of the temple.

Jesus twice invaded the outer court and overturned the tables. This violation of property rights was grounded in law: as the designated agent of the Owner, He was authorized to enforce the terms of the lease. This was a house of prayer; it had been turned into a place where thieves took advantage of worshippers. They were using the sacred character of the temple to extract monopoly profits. They were cashing in on God's name.

Jesus rightly regarded them as squatters. They presumably had been authorized by the chief priest to conduct their operations. By

9. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 65.

10. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 29.

11. "Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, to serve him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be his servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant; Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people" (Isa. 56:6–7).

12. "Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, saith the LORD" (Jer. 7:11).

physically assaulting the moneychangers, Jesus was announcing His revolt against the religious authorities. He was challenging the faithfulness of the hierarchy, i.e., the priesthood. They were false priests, He indirectly asserted. They deserved no better treatment than the moneychangers. In fact, they deserved worse. They knew better. They bore greater responsibility. "And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:47–48).[13]

The agent of the Owner routed the agents of the priesthood. The priests claimed to act on God's behalf in His name. Jesus visibly challenged this claim by forcibly driving out the priests' agents. This was a conflict between authorities: a self-ordained establishment vs. a man baptized by an outsider who was regarded by the people as a prophet. This was one more confrontation between a prophet and the priesthood. Prophets had usually lost these confrontations, and the ecclesiastical winners subsequently perished at the hand of some invading military power. So it would be again, but this time the invader would end the Old Covenant order by burning the temple.

Jesus' violation of the property rights of the economic agents of the priests was based on His superior claim of ownership. He did not appeal to the existing authorities to enforce His claim. He acted on His own authority, for He had been given this authority by the Owner. Soon thereafter, the priests would attempt to undermine His authority.

> And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority? And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet. And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell. And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things (Matt. 21:23–27).

13. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

Once again, He undermined their authority by His answer.

The priests feared the people. The people respected John's memory. Jesus had been baptized by John. If the people could not be swayed in their opinion regarding Jesus' authority, the priests were powerless to reassert their authority. Their hold on the affections of the people was tenuous. The question was: What about Jesus' hold on the people's affections? Could this be broken? He had used force against their agents. They would soon use force on Him, first in a trial before the Sanhedrin, and then by trials by Roman authorities.

Control over the temple was at the heart of the question of authority in Israel. *Through His actions against the moneychangers, Jesus was asserting a superior claim of authority*. He had already made this claim: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad. Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:56–58). *A prior legal claim is a superior claim*. He was asserting a claim that predated the temple.

The Jewish leaders had to silence His claim. If they could not do this, their claim of representation would be undermined. They would be overthrown. To silence Him, they finally appealed to Rome. They invoked Rome's authority in order to eliminate Jesus' authority. "But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15).

Jesus attacked the invaders of the temple. He did so in the name of God. He claimed to be the lawful heir. He referred to the temple as "my Father's house." In the context of what had taken place immediately prior to this confrontation, this was a sensational claim. The people had just proclaimed Him as the heir of David's throne. "And many spread their garments in the way: and others cut down branches off the trees, and strawed them in the way. And they that went before, and they that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest" (Mark 11:8–10). Now He was asserting jurisdiction over the temple. David could not have made such a claim. He had been a king, not a priest. He was of the family of Judah. Levi was the priestly family.

One man in history had possessed such authority: Melchizedek. "And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God" (Gen. 14:18). To him Abra-

ham presented tithes (v. 20). Jesus was therefore announcing a new priesthood, meaning a new hierarchy. "Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec" (Heb. 6:20). This meant that a New Covenant would be in force, with new laws. "For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law. For he of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood. And it is yet far more evident: for that after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest, Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life. For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec" (Heb. 7:12–17).

1. Resurrected Temple

The legal right of Jesus to throw out the moneychangers was verified by His resurrection. By this, He demonstrated publicly that He was God's designated agent. He possessed the right to enforce the terms of the lease. When the priestly leaseholders refused to cleanse the temple of thieves, they forfeited their right to represent God. God demonstrated this by tearing down the temple in A.D. 70.

The argument between Jesus and the Jews from beginning of His ministry to the end had centered on the temple. He invoked the language of the temple to describe the resurrection. Immediately following His first scattering of the moneychangers, the Jews asked Him for a sign to validate this authority. "Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body. When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said" (John 2:18–22). The Jews remembered this at the time of His trial, even though the disciples had temporarily forgotten. "And there arose certain [men], and bare false witness against him, saying, We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands. But neither so did their witness agree together" (Mark 14:57–59).

Which temple was doomed to permanent destruction? Jesus' body or the temple? At the resurrection, the world had half of its answer. In A.D. 70, the world had the other half.

Conclusion

The temple was a house of prayer. By using the sacred authority of the temple to establish monopolistic pricing, the priests and the moneychangers had profaned the temple, i.e., had violated sacred space. Jesus drove out the moneychangers because they were thieves. It was not the fact that there was exchange going on that outraged Him. It was convenient for men to buy unblemished beasts to sacrifice. It was convenient that they could buy coins acceptable in worship. But the moneychangers had become thieves, exploiting their delegated position as agents of the priesthood. Their corruption reflected the priesthood's corruption. Jesus drive them out.

The top priority established in this passage is to avoid using God's holy office of ecclesiastical minister as a means of exploiting worshippers. When men seek church offices to gain income based on a misuse of authority, they violate this rule. Paul wrote: "A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous" (I Tim. 3:2–3).[14] This is an extension of the top priority in this passage. Men who misuse God's holy office by stealing will be driven out.

The incident of the moneychangers forced people to decide who was worth their trust.

14. Gary North, *Hierarchy and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Timothy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press. [2001] 2012), ch. 4.

17

CONFISCATION IN THE NAME OF THE PEOPLE[1]

> *And he began to speak unto them by parables. A certain man planted a vineyard, and set an hedge about it, and digged a place for the winefat, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country. And at the season he sent to the husbandmen a servant, that he might receive from the husbandmen of the fruit of the vineyard. And they caught him, and beat him, and sent him away empty.*
>
> MARK 12:1–3

The theocentric principle here is the sovereignty of God over inheritance. God is the creator. He sets the terms of the leasehold. His Son, Jesus Christ, is the true heir in history and eternity.

A. The Davidic Inheritance

Jesus gave this parable to the religious leaders in the week preceding Passover. The people had strewn palm branches before Him as He entered the Jerusalem. They had acclaimed Him as the heir of David. "And they that went before, and they that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest" (Mark 11:9–10). This was a messianic declaration. Jacob had prophesied: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen. 49:10). No Jewish king had reigned in Israel since the Assyrian captivity. No Jewish king had reigned in Judah since the Babylonian captivity. Yet the

1. This is adapted from Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 43.

crowds were proclaiming Jesus the son of David. They were acknowledging that He was Shiloh, "and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." Jesus had the right to wear the sword of Judah. So said the Jewish masses.

This declaration offended the Jewish rulers. "And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David; they were sore displeased" (Matt. 21:15). The authorities set another trap for Him. "And they come again to Jerusalem: and as he was walking in the temple, there come to him the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders, And say unto him, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority to do these things?" (Mark 11:27–28). As He did so often, and with such devastating effect, He answered their question with a question: "I will also ask of you one question, and answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men? answer me. And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say, Why then did ye not believe him? But if we shall say, Of men; they feared the people: for all men counted John, that he was a prophet indeed. And they answered and said unto Jesus, We cannot tell. And Jesus answering saith unto them, Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things" (Mark 11:29–33). They feared being placed under the public's sanctions. So, they could not pursue Him by means of this strategy. He escaped from their trap once again.

The people had declared Him the heir of David's office. This threatened the Jewish establishment, which had a working alliance with Rome. David had been the great warrior king of Israel. If the multitude ordained Jesus as king, this could undermine the establishment's arrangement. It was clear to Pilate a week later that this was what bothered them. He understood that it was not religion that had motivated them, but politics. He also understood that Jesus was uninterested in politics, for He was self-consciously unbending to power. He was not afraid of Pilate or his sanctions. Jesus stood His ground with Pilate, and Pilate respected Him for this.

> Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin. And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend:

> whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar. When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha. And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King! But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar (John 19:10–15).

The Jewish rulers crawled before Rome's power at the expense of their theology. Jesus had challenged Pilate in terms of His theology. "Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin." Jesus told him that God was over him, and therefore the man who had delivered Him to Pilate—presumably, the chief priest—had the greater sin. Why? Because the chief priest's theology declared that God is in control, yet he had brought Pilate into this religious dispute because Pilate possessed the civil power of execution.

Pilate recognized the nature of the game that the Jewish rulers were playing, with him as the pawn. They were placing him between the rock and the hard place: either do their bidding or face public disorder which would undermine his reputation in Rome. As a politician, he recognized the political nature of what the priests were doing at his expense. They were painting him into a corner. Jesus had verbally put him in his place in terms of biblical authority, which Pilate did not respect, but Jesus was not trying to use him for His purposes. The priests were, and they invoked Roman politics in their manipulation: "We have no king but Caesar." Politicians do not like to be manipulated by other politicians. Pilate therefore preferred to let Jesus go. So, when he finally capitulated to the Jewish rulers for the sake of Roman politics, he gained symbolic revenge. "And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS. This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city: and it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin. Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews. Pilate answered, What I have written I have written" (John 19:19–22). He thereby publicly announced that Jesus was the heir to David's throne, and he, Pilate, had smashed it. Rome got the credit, not the Jewish politicians. This greatly annoyed the Jewish politicians, which was Pilate's goal.

B. Stealing the Inheritance

Jesus' parable of the owner of the vineyard rested on the Bible's theology of inheritance. An only son would inherit all of his father's property. This was not simply a matter of preserving a family's wealth. Far more important, it was a matter of preserving a man's name in Israel. What we call the levirate marriage law reveals the importance of a firstborn son's preservation of a man's name. "If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger: her husband's brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of an husband's brother unto her. And it shall be, that the firstborn which she beareth shall succeed in the name of his brother which is dead, that his name be not put out of Israel" (Deut. 25:5–6). Brothers who shared the same landed inheritance shared more than land. They shared mutual responsibility to preserve each other's name through procreation. The land that was part of the dead brother's inheritance would go to the firstborn son who was fathered by the surviving brother. This biological son would carry the dead brother's name. None of the land inherited by this son from the dead brother would be shared, at his death, with the heirs of the biological half-brothers born to his biological father. Family name was more important than bloodline inheritance in Israel.[2]

The owner in the parable had funded the planting of the vineyard. He then leased it out to people whose task was to care for it. He then went on a far journey. The imagery here is obvious: it is a recapitulation of Eden. The main difference is, the owner went on a far journey, not a morning excursion, as God did in the garden. The husbandmen could expect payment for their services, but only when the crop came in.

They cared for the vineyard. The issue was not the quality of their labor. It was the quality of their morals. They were thieves and murderers. They were intent on building up an inheritance of their own. But they had none. They had not funded the planting of the vineyard. It was not their land. They were hired hands. This inheritance belonged to the owner's son.

This legal arrangement offended the hired hands. After all, had they not remained in the field, in good weather and bad? Had not they remained on duty, defending the vineyard from predators, whether

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 64.

human or otherwise? Had they not invested years in the building up of the property? Did they not have an independent legal claim to part of the crop? To a large part of the crop? To all of the crop? To all future crops? Of course they did, they thought. And there was no one to tell them differently.

Then the harvest season approached, and the owner sent his servants home to administer the harvest and the distribution of the crop. The hired hands beat them and stoned them. He sent more servants. The same thing happened. Then he sent his son. This time, the hired hands saw a great opportunity: to collect not just the crop but the entire inheritance. "But those husbandmen said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours. And they took him, and killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard" (Mark 12:7–8).

Jesus then asked the rulers of Israel to render public judgment on the literary hired hands. "What shall therefore the lord of the vineyard do? he will come and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto others" (Mark 12:9). What Jesus did here was what Nathan had done to David (II Sam. 12:1–4). He told a story and asked those in authority to render judgment. As in the case of Nathan's judicial challenge, the targets condemned themselves. And, like Nathan, Jesus wasted no time in declaring the judicial equivalent of "thou art the man." "Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder" (Matt. 21:42–44).

With these words, the lawful heir of David's throne surrendered His claims to that throne and all of the associated inheritance. He transferred the kingdom to another nation, the church. Shiloh had come, and with His advent, as Jacob had prophesied, the sword was removed forever from Judah. That was because it was removed forever from Israel.

The parable was about a forced disinheritance: *disinheritance by illegal execution*. The judicial solution, said the Jewish rulers, was the execution of the hired hands and the transfer of administrative responsibilities to new employees. But there was a crucial problem with this solution: the absence of heirs. The solution might solve the

management problem; it could not solve the inheritance problem. The priests assumed that the father was still alive, as the parable indicated. But where would the owner get another son? The answer should have been obvious: by adoption.

The new heirs would care for the vineyard. They would not be hired hands. As adopted sons, they would have a stake in the inheritance. They would share the harvest. The gentiles would inherit.

But was not Israel the true son? Jesus had already lured them into publicly forfeiting any legal claim to that office. "But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him" (Matt. 21:28–32). The gentiles had long refused to go into the vineyard, but they were now about to go. The Jews had said they would go, but now they refused. The true son does the will of his father. "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love" (John 15:10).

C. His or Ours?

The hired hands asserted a claim of ownership. Standing between them and this claim was the owner, who was far away, and his servants, who were no match for the hired hands, and the son. The son was the least of their problems, as long as the owner stayed away. But, of course, he would not stay away, once word of his son's murder came to him. The rulers had understood this: "When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons." In the matter of power, the hired hands were superior to the servants and the son, but the owner was armed and dangerous.

The hired hands decided to confiscate the inheritance by killing the heir. In the name of the people—the workers of the world—they united to kill the son. When they did this, they secured their own judgment.

They would not retain their stolen goods indefinitely. The owner would come and destroy them. But they did not foresee this. They did not believe that he would return from the far country. They were fools.

The twentieth century, more than any in history, was the century of the rebellious hired hands. Because they adopted the Darwinian view of God, voters became convinced that the cosmic owner of the vineyard is not even in a far country; He is a figment of superstitious men's imaginations. Within a quarter century of Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859), Lester Frank Ward wrote *Dynamic Sociology* (1883), which asserted the right and obligation of the state's scientific planners to direct society, including the economy, into evolutionary progress. By 1900, this view of central planning had captured the minds of the leading intellectuals.[3] The Progressive movement in the United States and the social democracy movement in Europe invoked Darwinism as the model for, and justification of, social planning.

Social planning requires power. It also requires funds. Through state power, social planners have laid their hands on other people's money. They have transferred the inheritance of families into the coffers of the state. Taxation grew 10-fold or more in the twentieth century. The Bible-based observation that God has placed restrictions on lawful taxation—less than 10% of one's income (I Sam. 8:15, 17)—is greeted with hoots of derision, not only from social Darwinists but from Christian professors of social science, who have publicly baptized the recommendations of social Darwinism. "Don't give us that Old Testament stuff!" the Christian professors insist. What they really mean is, "Give us a state that taxes us at 40% of our income, twice the rate that Pharaoh extracted from the Egyptians." They call this "economic democracy." It is based on a revision of the eighth commandment: "Thou shalt not steal, except by majority vote."

The suggestion that the Bible sets forth as binding a private property social order is rejected without detailed consideration of what the Bible teaches.

1. Wiser Than God[4]

The vast majority of Christians have always believed that they can improve on the Mosaic law. On their own authority, they revise God's

3. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), Appendix A:N.

4. The following passage is taken from North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 62, section on "Wiser Than God."

law by coming to conclusions in the name of God that deny the specific teachings of God's revealed law. Then they proclaim their annulment-through-interpretation as being in conformity with "the true spirit of God's law" or "the underlying principles of God's law." As part of this improvement, they reject the binding authority of God's law. In doing so, they necessarily become advocates of some system of law proposed by one or another group of covenant-breakers. They refuse to ask themselves the obvious question: "If not God's law, then what?" They refuse to deal with the ethical question: "By what *other* standard?"[5]

As an example, consider the assertion of John Gladwin, a defender of central planning, who later became a bishop in the Anglican Church. In a chapter in a book devoted to Christian economics, he rejects the concept of the Bible as a source of authoritative economic guidelines or blueprints. In fact, he assures us, it is unbiblical to search for biblical guidelines for economics. "It is unhelpful as well as unbiblical to look to the Bible to give us a blueprint of economic theory or structure which we then apply to our contemporary life. We must rather work in a theological way, looking to the Bible to give us experience and insight into the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ. This then helps us discover values and methods of interpretation which we can use in understanding our present social experience."[6] Furthermore, "There is in Scripture no blueprint of the ideal state or the ideal economy. We cannot turn to chapters of the Bible and find in them a model to copy or a plan for building the ideal biblical state and national economy."[7] He contrasts biblical law unfavorably with theology. He then goes on to praise the welfare state as an application of theological, rather than legal, insights.[8] Theology informs us that "there is no escape from the need for large-scale state activity if our society is to move into a more equitable future at social and economic levels."[9] Clearly, neither the Mosaic law nor the New Testament teaches this, but theology supposedly does. Whose theology? Reinhold Niebuhr's.[10]

5. Greg L. Bahnsen, *No Other Standard: Theonomy and Its Critics* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991).

6. John Gladwin, "A Centralist Response," in Robert G. Clouse (ed.), *Wealth and Poverty: Four Christian Views of Economics* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1984), p. 124.

7. Gladwin, "Centralist Economics," ibiid., p. 183.

8. *Ibid*., pp. 125–26

9. Gladwin, "Centralist Economics," *ibid*., p. 193.

10. *Ibid*., p. 197. He cited *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (1932). It is an odd book to

So, we are assured, there are no authoritative economic guidelines or economic blueprints in the Bible. On the other hand, there are numerous vague and non-specific ethical principles which just about any Christian social theorist can invoke when promoting his recommended reconstruction of society. All it requires to baptize socialism is a series of nice-sounding pat phrases taken from the book of theological liberalism, which Gladwin offers in profusion: "the bounds of Christian principles of human concern," "the righteousness revealed to us in God himself," "the good," "structural framework of law and social values," "gross and deepening disparities in social experience," "spontaneity of love," "the light of the gospel," and "the most humane principles of social order."[11]

Lest you imagine that Gladwin is an aberration, consider the fact that the two other anti-free market essayists in the book adopted the same anti-blueprint hermeneutics. William Diehl, a defender of Keynesianism's state-guided economy, confidently affirms: "The fact that our Scriptures can be used to support or condemn any economic philosophy suggests that the Bible is not intended to lay out an economic plan which will apply for all times and places. If we are to examine economic structures in the light of Christian teachings, we will have to do it in another way."[12] Art Gish, a defender of small communities of Christians who hold property in common, informs us that "Since koinonia includes the participation of everyone involved, there is no blueprint for what this would look like on a global scale. . . . We are talking about a process, not final answers."[13]

The fact that these statements appear in a book on Christian economics should come as no surprise. These comments are typical of the opinions of humanist-educated Christian intellectuals. Christians who have spent their lives in humanist educational institutions, and who then have fed their minds on a steady diet of humanist publications, in most cases have adopted the worldview of one or another variety of humanism. They have felt emotionally compelled to baptize their adopted worldview with a few religious-sounding phrases.

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cite. It was written by the author in reaction against his youthful fling with Marxism, a book in which he proclaimed that Jesus "did not dwell upon the social consequences of these moral actions, because he viewed them from an inner and a transcendent perspective." Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York: Scribner's, [1932] 1960), p. 264.

11. See my critique in *Wealth and Poverty*, p. 200.
12. William Diehl, "The Guided-Market System," *ibid.*, p. 87.
13. Art Gish, "Decentralist Economics," *ibid.*, p. 154.

But just because someone keeps repeating "koinonia, koinonia" as a Christian mantra does not prove that his recommended policies of common ownership will actually produce koinonia.[14] What produces peace, harmony, and increasing per capita output is widespread faithfulness to biblical law.

It is unwise to attempt to become wiser than God. "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (I Cor. 1:25). This is why it is our job to become familiar with God's Bible-revealed law. Biblical law, not the latest academic fad, is to be our guide, generation after generation.

Conclusion

A private property social order is mandated by biblical law. Where biblical law is enforced, free market capitalism has to develop. Modern fundamentalists in the pews generally believe in capitalism, but they do not believe that biblical civil law is still valid. So, their defense of capitalism implicitly rests on some baptized version of secular epistemology, whether natural law (Adam Smith), natural rights (Murray Rothbard), Kantianism (Ludwig von Mises), or empiricism (Milton Friedman). Meanwhile, the neo-evangelicals go off to college and come back mostly confused.[15]

The top priority in this parable is honoring the rights of owner-

14. If you wonder what "koinonia" means, you are probably not a left-wing advocate of common ownership. Understand, I am not suggesting that voluntary common ownership is anti-Christian, any more than I am saying that voluntary celibacy is anti-Christian. Paul recommended celibacy (I Cor. 7:32–33). He did so, he said, because of "the present distress" (v. 26). Similarly, the Jerusalem church held property in common (Acts 2:44; 4:32). Shortly thereafter, a great persecution of the church began. The entire church fled the city, except for the apostles (Acts 8:1). This exodus created the first foreign missions program in church history: "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). The fact that they had sold their property enabled them to leave the city without looking back, as Lot's wife had looked back. So, for temporary purposes in times of great trial, voluntary celibacy and voluntary common ownership are legitimate, even wise. But to make either practice a recommended institutional model for all times and places is a misuse of historical events. The one institution where common ownership has been productive for longer than one generation is the monastery. However, it takes celibacy to make this system work for longer than a few years. As soon as there is a wife saying, "He's earning as much as you are, but you're far more productive," koinonia ends. In the modern state of Israel, the kibbutz collective farms faded rapidly as important sources of national production.

15. Ronald J. Sider is probably the best example. Compare the first edition of his book, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (1977), with the 1997 edition. For my comparison, see *Inheritance and Dominion*, Appendix F.

ship. As surely as men should honor the God of creation and His son, so should they honor God's ownership of this world and His delegation of stewardship to his servants. *Delegated ownership is the basis of maintaining the kingdom grant*. The state has no legitimate claim on income that matches the church's: the tithe.[16] But modern Christians, wiser than God, have dismissed the tithe as "Old Testament stuff," and have wound up paying less than a tithe to the church and four times a tithe to the civil government. God is not mocked.

God's judgment will surely come on this society of murderous, thieving hired hands. "And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it" (Matt. 7:26–27). When this happens, Christians had better be well prepared in advance for the collapse of the hired hands' Darwinian order. They had better not be dependent on it. But most of them will be. They live under a regime that rests on taxation twice as confiscatory as Pharaoh's, and their academic spokesmen praise it as democratic capitalism. These people view democracy as a system whereby two wolves and a lamb vote to decide what to have for lunch.

16. Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994).

18

RENDERING UNTO CAESAR AND GOD[1]

> *And when they were come, they say unto him, Master, we know that thou art true, and carest for no man: for thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth: Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not? Shall we give, or shall we not give? But he, knowing their hypocrisy, said unto them, Why tempt ye me? bring me a penny, that I may see it. And they brought it. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? And they said unto him, Caesar's. And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. And they marvelled at him.*
>
> MARK 12:14–17

The theocentric principle here was the distinction between God's ownership and man's. Men owe God for the use of His goods, in the same way that they owe the government for services rendered. If the state has the power to enforce payment, surely God does, too. The issue was hierarchy, point two of the biblical covenant.[2]

A. Tribute Money

Accompanying the Pharisees were Herodians, a priestly party allied with the Sadducees.[3] Herod was the regional monarch. He was under Rome's authority. He was an Idumean, meaning an heir of Esau.[4]

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1. This is adapted from Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 44.

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economic, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1982] 2010), ch. 2.

3. "Herodians," *Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1904), IV, p. 360.

4. "Herod," *Columbia Encyclopedia*, 5th ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993). See also, "Edom."

Those who were allied to Herod were normally not friends of the Pharisees. But Jesus was a problem for both groups. He was undermining their authority. The two groups joined forces on the assumption that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend"—until the enemy is removed. Jesus recognized the nature of this temporary alliance and warned His disciples against both groups.[5] Forty years later, the Idumeans joined forces with the Jews to resist Rome, then turned on the Jews when the siege of Jerusalem began. They looted the Jews. Titus slew some and sold an "immense" number of them into slavery after the city fell.[6]

The Pharisees sought to entrap Jesus. The Romans were hated by the Jews. Roman rule was regarded as tyrannical. If Jesus could be lured into acknowledging the legitimacy of Roman rule, He would lose favor with the Jews, for they resented this rule. They paid their taxes, but they did so grudgingly. On the other hand, if He denied the legitimacy of taxation by Rome, the Herodians would surely report this to the Roman authorities. He would be trapped, or so they imagined.

They began with flattery: "Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men." In other words, "Say your piece loud and clear, sucker; then we'll be rid of you forever." Jesus was not fooled. He identified them for what they were: "Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?" The hypocrite feigns righteousness but in fact is a sinner.

He asked them to show him a coin. "Shew me the tribute money." They brought it to Him. At that point, He had them trapped. The "penny" was a denarius. This was a coin used specifically to pay taxes. If taxes were not legitimate, why did his critics possess one? Furthermore, it bore an image. It also had an inscription. The inscription invoked the language of divinity. The Jews regarded this as idolatrous. But they had brought Him a coin. What were they doing with such coins?[7]

Jesus asked them specifically: Whose image? Whose inscription? Caesar's, they answered. What else could they say? "Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." By acknowledging

5. "And he charged them, saying, Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod" (Mark 8:15).

6. Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, VI:VIII:2.

7. Ethelbert Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars: Historical Sketches* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), ch. 8.

that they possessed a tax coin, they were also acknowledging that Rome brought civil order. Such order must be paid for. If Caesar's image and inscription were on the coin, then those who used such coins in trade were gaining a benefit: money. By using money to gain what they wanted to buy rather than bartering, they were extending the division of labor. This increases men's output per unit of resource input. It makes them wealthier.

Caesar's rule had brought social stability. It had created international legal framework for economic growth. It was Rome, not Israel, that had built the highways and had cleared the Mediterranean Sea of pirates. There are no free lunches, and Rome was merely collecting what belonged to it. Jesus was saying that the benefits of economic growth had to be paid for. The beneficiaries owed something to the state.

A coin was a mark of state sovereignty in the ancient world. It still is. The theology of Rome was visible on Rome's coins. The image and the inscription announced the divinity of the emperor: "Emperor Tiberius august Son of the august God."[8] This is what angered the Jews. But the agents of the Pharisees or their Herodian allies had such a coin in their possession. The Herodians were content with the coins. The Herod of Jesus' infancy had been a ruthless tax collector.[9] But the Pharisees were indeed hypocrites. This is why Jesus said a bit later, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone" (Matt. 23:23).[10]

Jesus was not arguing that Caesar owned everything that he laid claim to. On the contrary, men are to render to God what God possesses. What Caesar owned was legal sovereignty over the political system that provided the Roman Empire's money. This legal system had to be supported by taxes. Israel was benefitting from this system, despite the system's inequities. Besides, Israel was under judgment, and had been since the captivity. Living under foreign domination was nothing new for Israel. Rome had brought greater trade and prosperity by opening up new markets. Israel was benefitting from the arrangement. On what basis should Israelites have refused to pay taxes? Jesus had the answer: none. But He gave this answer in such a way that the Pharisees could not embarrass Him.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 125.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 116–17.
10. North, *Priorities and Dominion*, ch. 46.

B. What Belongs to God

The Israelites' tithe money went to support the priests. The priests were Sadducees, the Pharisees' rivals.[11] By reminding the people of their obligations to God, Jesus was undermining the authority of the Pharisees. He was reminding them that they owed a tithe. This meant that they owed God by way of the Sadducees' faction. This was a public challenge to the Pharisees.

Jesus used this incident to lay the foundation for a comprehensive covenant lawsuit against Israel. God is owed far more than the tithe, He warned them, and they had not paid God what He was owed. Judgment was coming.

> Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation (Matt. 23:23–36).[12]

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11. Herbert Danby, Introduction, *The Mishnah* (New York: Oxford University Press, [1933] 1987), p. xiii.

12. Any Christian who argues, as so many do, that confrontational language is not Christian has not come to grips with this passage's rhetoric. When the self-assured critic has this passage pointed out to him, the standard response is: "Well, you're not Jesus." This is quite true, but the critic may well be Pharisaical.

Jesus passed the dilemma back to the Pharisees. If they denied Rome's right of taxation, they risked political suppression by Rome. If they affirmed this right, they would have undermined their popularity with the more radical factions of the people. If they affirmed the tithe, they also had to affirm the Sadducee party. If they denied the tithe, they had to oppose Moses. So, they went away . . . again. Jesus had successfully silenced them, just as they had sought to silence Him . . . again.

C. Tithes and Taxes

The tithe is mandatory. It preceded the Mosaic law. Abraham paid a tithe to Melchizedek (Gen. 14:20). There is nothing in the New Testament to indicate that this law has been annulled. Only the recipients have changed: from the local Levites to the local churches. Through Christ, the church is the heir of the Melchizedekan priesthood. "So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee. As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec" (Heb. 5:5–6). "Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him; To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace" (Heb. 6:20–7:2). Covenant-keepers owe the local church their tithes.[13]

What do they owe the state? Less than a tithe. Any system of civil government that takes as much as 10% is tyrannical, Samuel warned.

> And he said, This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and some shall run before his chariots. And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots. And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his

13. Gary North, *The Covenantal Tithe* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2011); Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994).

> servants. And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants. And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the LORD will not hear you in that day" (I Sam. 8:11–18).[14]

The Israelites refused to heed this warning (v. 19). In the twentieth century, Christians did not cry out when the state extracted four times the tithe or even more from them. They lived under what the Bible clearly identifies as tyranny, yet they called it democratic liberty. What roused their ire was any suggestion that they owed a tithe to their local churches. "We're under grace, not law!" they proclaimed. In fact, they were under pagan law, pagan bureaucrats, pagan tax collectors, and pagan lawyers. This has yet to change.

Pagans have denied that the Old Testament applies to modern times. Christians have agreed. Pagans have asserted the sovereignty of the state to extract money far beyond the tithe. Christians have agreed. Pagans have affirmed the right of the tax collector to require comprehensive income records from every taxpayer. Christians have agreed. Yet any suggestion that a church's officers possess a similar right would be met with total opposition by church members. No one suggests that such authority is possessed by the church. Well, not quite. No one other than me. I argue that every *voting* church member must prove that he tithes, and this requires him to submit such records to the elders.[15] But no one agrees with me. Protestant churches offer voting membership to any adult who joins. Non-tithing members are given the right to vote for leaders who will decide how to spend the church's money.

The state has merely imitated the Protestant churches in opening the vote to non-taxpaying citizens. It collects tax money from every resident on a graduated basis, and it exempts some citizens from paying taxes.[16] Yet it allows any citizen to vote, irrespective of the percentage of his income that the state collects. This is the judicial basis of the modern welfare state and the politics of plunder. What the church allows to its non-tithing members, the state allows its non-taxpaying citizens. A few Christians argue that the graduated income tax is wrong, but they never see that the graduated income tax sys-

14. Gary North, *Disobedience and Defeat: An Economic Commentary on the Historical Books* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 14.

15. North, *Tithing and the Church*, ch. 3.

16. The poor who are on government welfare pay no income taxes in the United States. Income derived from income from municipal bonds is also income tax-free.

tem was pioneered by Protestant churches that do not distinguish a voting member from a communicant member by means of the tithe. They see no contradiction here. The tax-funded school system has done its work well.

D. Revolt: Tax or Tithe

If it is wrong for the state to collect taxes beyond the tithe, is it right for citizens to revolt when taxes exceed the tithe? Not if they can change the law legally. Not if they can legally beat the tax system individually. A tyranny involves more than high levels of taxation. Tax rates identify a tyranny, but tyranny is a package deal. The Bible identifies as rebellious every civil government that does not acknowledge the God of the Bible as sovereign. But the solution is not armed revolt; the answer is evangelism, followed by the invocation of a new civil covenant. A new personal covenant is only the beginning of the Great Commission. The long-term goal is a new civil covenant. This is an implication of the Great Commission: "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matt. 28:18–20).[17]

Jesus told His followers to obey the Pharisees, even though He knew that they taught men's traditions rather than the Mosaic law. "Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers" (Matt. 23:1–4). He knew the religious leaders were hypocrites; nevertheless, He told His followers to obey them. Why? Because the Old Covenant had not yet been annulled historically. The temple still stood. Until the sacrificial fires were extinguished forever, the religious leaders possessed legitimate authority. The Christians would have to wait for deliverance. It came in A.D. 70.[18]

17. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission: The Christian Enterprise in a Fallen World* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990).

18. David Chilton, *The Great Tribulation* (Tyler, Texas: Dominion Press, [1987] 1997).

There is no need to rush when it comes to throwing off a self-imposed tyranny. God will eventually destroy it. His people must work to replace it, not through violence, but through principled non-violent resistance and political mobilization. (Educating their children with an explicitly Christian curriculum is basic to such a strategy.) The apostles refused to obey when told not to preach the gospel (Acts. 5:29), but they willingly suffered the consequences of this disobedience. "[A]nd when they [the Jewish council] had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ" (Acts 5:40b–42).

Conclusion

Jesus made it clear that the state is entitled to taxes. He implied that the church is entitled to money. If we do not turn to the Old Testament to find out what the limits of taxes and church contributions are, we shall forever be caught between the tax collector and the church in their quest for funding. The Old Testament provides information on these limits. For the church, the limit is 10 percent of our net income. For the state, the limit is less than 10 percent. The state does not have the right before God to extract from residents as high a percentage as the church has the right to demand of its voting members. Any state that demands as much as 10 percent is a tyranny. The total level of taxation, from local civil government upward, must be less than 10 percent of a person's net income.

The modern church does not believe this. The result is a church that does not have the courage to demand tithes of its voting members, and a state that cannot resist extracting at least four times more than the tithe. Christians have sought to starve God's church by refusing to tithe. Meanwhile, the messianic state extracts their wealth unmercifully. God is not mocked.

The top priority in this passage is social budgeting based on the Bible. The Bible identifies what God is legally entitled to and what the state is legally entitled to. This, the modern world has refused to acknowledge. The result in our day is the widespread acceptance of the welfare state. The end result of this is personal dependence on the state and eventual economic and social bankruptcy.

19

THE WIDOW'S GIFT AND GRADUATED TAXATION[1]

> *And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.*
>
> MARK 12:41–44

The theocentric issue here is God as omniscient: He searches people's hearts and then sovereignly imputes value to their actions. Imputation, or judgment, is point four of the biblical covenant.[2]

A. Interpersonal Comparisons of Subjective Utility

This passage rests on an assumption: *God has the ability to make accurate interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility*. Jesus announced that the poor widow had given away more than the rich men had given collectively. They had given away only a small fraction of their wealth, but the widow had given all of her money. Jesus looked into their minds and hers, and He drew conclusions regarding comparative rates of sacrifice. His conclusion: giving away all the money that a person owns is a greater sacrifice than giving away only part of the money that another person owns.

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1. Adapted from Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 50.

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

Is this observation universally true? If it is, should civil governments adopt this principle to guide tax policy? This is a major logical problem of all modern economic theory, which is grounded in epistemological subjectivism. The problem appears to have no solution in terms of the presuppositions of subjective economics. The presumed inability of economists or anyone else to make scientifically valid interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility is a fundamental flaw of modern economic theory. Economists rarely discuss this problem because it has not been solved scientifically or philosophically. To get from the subjective utility scales of individuals to objective social utility is scientifically impossible, according to the logic of individualism. This strips economic theory of all relevance for social policy. But economists want to believe that what they teach can become relevant for social policy. So, they ignore this epistemological problem. They offer policy suggestions to politicians and bureaucrats as if it had been solved. If there is a solution, we have waited for over seven decades for someone to prove it.

To make comparisons between two people's individual utilities, the evaluator has to assume that there is *a common value scale* between them. The evaluator must also be able to intuit this scale on the basis of *introspection*. This common value scale must exist in order for the assessment to be accurate. For example, if the widow had been a religious fanatic who believed that all money is cursed, her gift would not have constituted a great sacrifice. She was merely getting rid of something that would destroy her. In her opinion, she was exposing the recipients of her money to a curse. But, while the widow in theory could have been operating in terms of such a view of money, Jesus and His listeners assumed that she was basically like most people. Giving away her last coins was a major sacrifice on her part, evidence of her trust in God to supply her with additional money in the near future.

Modern subjectivist economic theory denies the existence of a common ethical standard, common tastes, or a common evaluator on the day of judgment. It affirms that each person is different. This destroys the concept of a common humanity. It therefore destroys the possibility of a common objective scale of values linking all men. This means that there can be no scientifically valid interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility. Nevertheless, we make such comparisons all the time. Jesus' comparison rested on the assumption of a common humanity with common values. He could not otherwise have com-

pared accurately the collective value of the rich men's gifts with the widow's.

B. Grading Examinations

Let me use an analogy based on classroom examinations and grading. Jesus graded the woman's performance in terms of her economic capacity. He did the same with her fellow students. He gave her a higher grade, even though her competitors received higher numerical scores.

A grading system that ignores everyone's numerical score and substitutes a teacher's subjective estimations of the intellectual capacity of each student would destroy the examination system, because it would destroy the predictability of any relationship between performance and reward. The brighter students would conclude that no teacher is able to make such comparisons. They would regard the grading system as unfair, arbitrary, and therefore not worth studying for.

Yet, not only does this passage teach that God can make such comparisons, it assumes that other people can do this, too. Jesus would not have used this example to make His point regarding the sacrificial nature of giving, had He not expected His listeners to understand Him and agree with Him.

This raises the issue of application. What did Jesus want His listeners, including us, to do with this information? I think most readers would agree with His point: the widow gave more sacrificially than the rich men did. She was putting her life at risk. What if she could not earn another coin? Where would her next meal come from? She was trusting God to care for her. Her trust was greater than the trust of the rich donors. By giving more sacrificially, Jesus said, she gave more, economically speaking.

But what can we legitimately do with this information? We can praise the widow. We can pray to God for comparable trust in Him and His care for His people, so that we can become more like the widow. We can also remind ourselves that the generosity of the rich does not impress God. But we cannot do much more than this.

We cannot run a business or a government or a church on such a principle of sacrificial giving. We surely cannot afford to sell new cars to poor widows who are willing to pay everything they own to buy one. We cannot legitimately establish a tax system that is based on the assumption that tax collectors can make interpersonal comparisons of everyone's subjective utility, as if they can know what the

comparative psychological burden of each taxpayer is and assess an equal psychological burden for all taxpayers by assessing unequal numerical rates of taxation. We cannot run a church this way, because the church is governed by the principle of the tithe: a flat rate of 10 percent.[3] Then why did Jesus raise the question of the widow's gift?

C. Another Challenge to the Religious Leaders

Immediately preceding His assessment of the donors' gifts, Jesus had announced: "Beware of the scribes, which desire to walk in long robes, and love greetings in the markets, and the highest seats in the synagogues, and the chief rooms at feasts; Which devour widows' houses, and for a shew make long prayers: the same shall receive greater damnation" (Luke 20:46–47). These men wanted public acclaim and approval. They were in fact thieves. They devoured widows' estates. They appeared to be righteous. They were not. They loved acclaim more than they loved justice.

Jesus was once again pulling them down from their lofty positions. Their damnation, He said, will be worse than the damnation handed out to common criminals. On judgment day, God will compare their lofty claims of righteousness with their actual performance. This is why they will be damned with greater pain. God expects more from those who have been given more information (Luke 12:47–48).[4]

With His assessment of the widow's two mites, Jesus made a judicial point. With respect to the final judgment, He said, God will hand out negative sanctions and positive sanctions, first, in terms of His knowledge of each person's innate capacities. Second, He will grade redeemed men in terms of what they did in history in relation to His holy law, which is written in their hearts (Heb. 8:10; 10:16). Third, He will judge Old Covenant saints in terms of what His revealed law said, although it was not written on their hearts. Fourth, He will judge covenant-breakers in terms of the work of the law written on their hearts (Rom. 2:15–16).[5] Fifth, He will grade all men in terms of what they understood about their responsibilities and were capable of obeying. Being infinite, God can justly hand out final rewards and

3. Gary North, *The Covenantal Tithe* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2011); Gary North, *Tithing and the Church* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1994).

4. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 28.

5. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 3.

punishments in terms of an objective standard—God's Bible-revealed law—and also in terms of what men knew subjectively and what the did objectively in history.

No man can exercise such comprehensive, complex judgment in history. No earthly institution has been established by God with the covenantal, oath-bound authority to do this. Such a human institution would become arbitrary and corrupt very soon. Its defenders would be claiming its divinity, and by implication, the divinity of its employees acting collectively.

D. The Graduated Income Tax

In 1912, A. C. Pigou's book appeared, *Wealth and Welfare*. He was a professor of economics at Cambridge University. In this book, and in his more famous *Economics of Welfare* (1920), he argued for higher rates of income taxation on the rich. He defended his recommendation by an appeal to subjective value theory.

The marginalist revolution of the 1870s by 1912 had led most economists to conclude that the subjective value to the individual of each additional unit of monetary income is worth less than the previous unit. He satisfies his highest remaining wants with each additional monetary unit; therefore, each additional unit is worth less to him, for it satisfies wants of reduced value. Then Pigou made a leap of faith. He said that an additional monetary unit in a rich man's income stream is worth less to him than an additional unit is worth to a poor man. The poor man will satisfy much higher-level wants with his additional monetary unit than the rich man will satisfy on his scale of wants.[6]

This sounds similar to Jesus' assessment of the widow's mite. The logic of Jesus' assessment rests on something like Pigou's comparisons. We recognize the truth of both. But there is this crucial difference: Jesus did not recommend any institutional policy on the basis of His assessment of the widow and the rich donors. Pigou did. Jesus was talking about God's final judgment and men's ability to understand today the righteousness of God's final judgment. He was not recommending that men delegate to civil government the authority to impose graduated taxes backed up by the threat of public sanctions. Jesus did not assume that tax collectors possess God's ability to make precise interpersonal comparisons of individuals' subjective utilities,

6. A. C. Pigou, *The Economics of Welfare*, 4th ed. (London: Macmillan, 1932), pp. 89–91.

nor do they possess His ability to make precise subjective assessments of other men's actions in relation to their varying individual capacities to understand and obey His objective law.

Pigou was implicitly asserting that tax policy should be formulated in terms of an assumption, namely, that tax collectors have the ability to mimic God's final judgment, including the imposition of negative sanctions for anyone's failure to pay taxes. This was exactly what politicians wanted to hear. The income tax was imposed in England in 1911. It was about to be voted on in the United States in 1912.[7]

Pigou's message was what economists wanted to hear, too. They wanted to believe that they, as neutral scientists, possess the ability to make such comparisons accurately and then advise politicians regarding socially optimum rates of graduated taxation. This unique scientific ability makes economists indispensable in setting public policy.

It may have seemed as though Pigou was a disinterested scholar. He was anything but disinterested. He was a secret admirer of the Bolsheviks. He had been corresponding with various Bolshevik leaders in exile as early as 1905.[8] In the 1920s, he secretly recommended to the Soviet spy apparatus operating in England the names of businessmen who might engage in Soviet trade. The businessmen had no idea he had suggested them.[9] In 1937, he wrote the following: "If, then, it were in the writer's power to direct his country's destiny, he would accept, for the time being, the general structure of capitalism; but he would modify it gradually. He would use the weapon of graduated death duties and graduated income tax, not merely as instruments of revenue, but with the deliberate purpose of diminishing the glaring inequalities of fortune and opportunity which deface our present civilization. He would take a leaf from the book of Soviet Russia and remember that the most important investment of all is investment in the health, intelligence and character of the people."[10] When Pigou

7. The imposition of an income tax by the United States government required a Constitutional amendment. The 16th amendment was voted on in 1912. It did not pass, according to the legal requirements governing amendments. Thirty-six of the 48 states had to ratify it to amend the Constitution. At least 16 states did not ratify it, or did not ratify it properly. But the U.S. government announced that it had passed, and in 1913, the government levied a graduated income tax. On the failure of the amendment to pass, see R. W. Beckman and W. Benson, *The Law That Never Was*, 2 vols. (South Holland, Illinois: Constitutional Research Associates, 1985, 1986).

8. John Costello, *Mask of Treachery* (New York: Morrow, 1988), p. 646n. He cites Richard Deacon, *The British Connection* (London: Hasmish Hamilton, 1979), pp. 66–67.

9. *Ibid*., pp. 170–71.

10. A. C. Pigou, *Socialism Versus Capitalism* (London: Macmillan, 1937), pp. 137–38.

spoke of graduated income taxation as a weapon, he spoke correctly. In the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), Marx and Engels anonymously recommended a system of graduated income taxation as step two of 10 steps to move a nation into socialism.[11] Pigou was following the Party Line, but with a more sophisticated argument.

In 1932, Lionel Robbins offered his critique of the use of the concept of declining marginal utility to justify graduated income taxes. He said that it is impossible for economists to make scientifically valid interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility.[12] He was correct. The problem was, this denial also applied to all known examples of social policy. This means that economists, as scientists, must stay silent regarding the costs and benefits of any public policy. Roy Harrod made this point in response to Robbins in an essay in the *Economic Journal* in 1938. In a 1939 response, Robbins backed away from his sweeping statement regarding the limits of economics in policy-making. He did not explain why his earlier argument had been wrong. He merely affirmed the ability of economists to make some policy recommendations. So, the debate ended. Graduated income taxation is with us still, and most economists seem content with it in principle.

The Bible lays down the principle of the tithe: a flat tax imposed by God on His people for the support of the local institutional church. No church enforces this on its voting members. No church has a separate category of membership—voting members—which mandates the tithe. God imposes the requirement, but churches have not dared to enforce it. The tithe has become a matter of conscience.

What is true of the modern church is not true of the modern state. The modern state mandates different rates of taxation according to income levels. It does so in the name of social justice or fairness. Rich people are supposed to pay their "fair share." Their fair share is always officially higher—before any special-interests' loopholes are quietly inserted into the tax code—than the tax rates imposed on a majority of the voters by the politicians.[13]

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11. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), end of Part II.

12. Lionel Robbins, *An Essay on the Nature & Significance of Economic Science*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1935), pp. 136–41.

13. Gary North, "The Politics of the 'Fair Share,'" *The Freeman* (Nov. 1993).

Conclusion

The widow trusted God far more than she trusted her money. The much richer donors trusted God far less than she did. They did not transfer all of their money to the temple.

When the widow donated every coin that she had, she sacrificed a great deal. Her gift was more impressive as a token of her faith than the larger gifts made by rich men. Jesus used this example to make a point: God is not greatly impressed by gifts from the rich. He is also not greatly impressed by rich scribes who steal from widows.

The fact that the widow gave more, in the sense of having trusted God more, is not to become the basis of a graduated taxation scheme. Jesus did not say that the officials of the state can accurately make interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility. Every piece of legislation is based on some view of benefits and losses to members of society, which means that there is a vague way to assess broadly a society's social utility, but any suggestion that policy-makers can perceive fine distinctions of men's comparative assessments of value is fraudulent.

To protect church members from guilt manipulation or actual extortion for receiving the sacraments, God established the limit of the tithe. He also revealed to Israel that a level of civil taxation as high as the tithe is tyranny (I Sam. 8:15, 17). So, the suggestion that the ability of people to make broad comparisons of subjective utility cannot be used legitimately to justify a scientific case for graduated taxation or graduated tithing.

20

HOLY WASTEFULNESS

> *And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head. And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her. And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me. For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always.*
>
> MARK 14:3–7

The theocentric principle here is the right of Jesus to receive sacrifices from His followers. This was a from of tribute. The woman placed a higher value on Jesus than on her ointment. This was an issue of hierarchy, point two of the biblical covenant.[1]

This passage provides the context for the oft-quoted phrase, "the poor you have with you always." The context is crucial for understanding the crucifixion.

A. Two Hosts Named Simon

Jesus had visited the home of another man named Simon, at Simon's request, at the beginning of His ministry. Simon was a Pharisee. He was curious about Jesus. So, he invited Jesus to dinner (Luke 7:36).

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economic, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1982] 2010), ch. 2.

1. The First Foot-Washing

An almost identical incident had taken place. "Behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment. And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment" (Luke 7:38–39).

This bothered Simon, for he had thought Jesus was a prophet.

> Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.

Jesus then demonstrated that He was indeed a prophet. He read Simon's mind. He then responded to Simon's thoughts.

> And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.
>
> And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.
>
> Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also? And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace (Luke 7:39–50).

Jesus publicly called Simon to task. This woman had been a sinner. She obviously had repented. He reminded Simon that this woman had repented of widely known sin. Why shouldn't she express publicly her knowledge of the extent of her deliverance? "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace."

The disciples had seen this. They had learned that Jesus was not opposed to holy wastefulness when circumstances warranted it. This woman wanted an opportunity to express her devotion and her thankfulness. Holy wastefulness was appropriate.

2. The Second Foot-Washing

The second incident also took place in another Simon's house three years later. It took place shortly before the Passover. I am reprinting these accounts in their entirety in order to show that they describe the same encounter. Here is Matthew's version.

> Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat at meat. But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor. When Jesus understood it, he said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me. For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always. For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her (Matt. 26:6–13).

Matthew then records the most significant historical fact relating to this incident.

> Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, And said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him (Matt. 26:14–16).

In this incident, Jesus' confrontation was with His disciples, not His host. This time, the woman was not a prostitute. This time it was Mary, the sister of Lazarus, who lived in the area. Jesus had only recently raised him from the dead (John 11). John recorded additional details.

> Then Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead. There they made him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him. Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein. Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this. For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always (John 12:1–8).

We learn that the family of Lazarus arranged and financed the feast in his honor. It was a feast of resurrection. The feast was held in

Simon's house. He was willing to open his home to Jesus on Lazarus' behalf. This took courage. Lazarus was a marked man.

> Much people of the Jews therefore knew that he was there: and they came not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might see Lazarus also, whom he had raised from the dead. But the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death; Because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus (John 12:9–11).

Second, we learn that Judas was a thief. He concealed his greed in a cloak of caring. He publicly accused Jesus of not stopping Mary from her act of holy wastefulness. Only Jesus had the authority to stop her. He had refused. Jesus had robbed him of a great opportunity, and he was outraged. He lured the other disciples into moral self-righteousness. They joined with him in their criticism of Jesus.

He soon made an offer to the religious leaders who wanted to kill Lazarus. Why waste time and effort to kill Lazarus? Why not kill the man who raised Lazarus from the dead? All it would take was an inside man, who could identify Him. All it would take was thirty pieces of silver—a bargain!

Judas was a fool—the supreme fool in all of human history. No one else comes close.

B. Holy Wastefulness

Two women anointed Jesus' feet with ointment. The first was a prostitute. The second was a friend. In both instances, those who saw it were upset by the incident. Simon the Pharisee was upset because he thought he was not entertaining a prophet after all. The disciples were upset by Jesus' consent to holy wastefulness. Judas was upset because he had lost a fine opportunity for a large profit.

Jesus was not upset. The women were displaying their devotion by sacrificing something of high economic value. They were subordinating themselves to Jesus by washing His feet with their hair. This was a liturgical act. Foot washing was a way of showing devotion. Within hours, Jesus washed the disciples' feet at the last supper.

> Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.
>
> Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost

> thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all. For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean.
>
> So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him (John 13:3–16).

C. The Permanent Poor

There are always poor people. The distribution of wealth is uneven. The famous law of Vilfredo Pareto is this: every society has the same pattern. About 20% of the population owns 80% of the capital. There have been no exceptions after over a century of research.

Jesus' comment pointed to what all men know: there will always be winners and losers. There will be people at the top and people at the bottom. But these people will change over time. A person's relative position is not permanent in commercial societies.

No matter how much help the rich give, there will always be poor people. In any case, the rich have their assets in tools of production. They can give what this capital produces in income. They cannot give away the capital to the poor. In any case, the poor would just sell it. The poor do not know what to do with sophisticated capital investment. Almost no one knows what to do with it.

What constitutes poverty in one society might be middle-class wealth in another. The same is true over time. People today live better than the wealthiest people a century ago. There is a rising tide of economic growth that elevates everyone.

Jesus was saying that the opportunity for giving away wealth to the poor is permanent. The opportunities for publicly showing great devotion are limited. Great economic sacrifices are rare events, precisely because they are great. They deplete capital. Showing such public devotion to Jesus was possible for only three years. These two women are the archetypes of such devotion.

Conclusion

The devotion shown by these two women was great. It cost them plenty. They revealed their thankfulness in a way understood by everyone: forfeited wealth. Their devotion did not gain them cheers from religious leaders or trainees: Simon the Pharisee or the disciples. But Jesus praised them.

CONCLUSION

The Gospel of Mark has a primary economic theme: trust. It is not a theme which runs through his Gospel as consistently as "priorities" runs through Matthew and "treasure" runs through Luke. It sometimes is subsumed under "faith." But the theme is common enough to identify.

The book begins with an account of Jesus' call to four men, two sets of brothers, who were preparing their fishing boats on the Sea of Galilee. He called them to follow Him. He said they will become fishers of men. They immediately left their boats to follow him.[1] This is the visible exercise of trust. It is representative of Jesus' call to people throughout history. Most people in the West do not receive such an all-or-nothing call. The civilization has been Christian in the past. A Christian cultural echo still exists. Those people who are called in the midst of a pagan culture are asked to make such a change.

The brothers made rapid economic assessments. They decided in favor of Christ's call. They had to pay for their individual decisions. They lost whatever net income their careers as fishermen might have produced. They also became eccentrics. They were men with capital, yet they abandoned it to follow a wandering preacher. This was not normal behavior. It still isn't.

> And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it (Matt. 10:38–39).[2]

> Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake

1. Chapter 1.

2. Gary North, *Priorities and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 24.

> shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Matt. 16:24–26)[3]

Levi-Matthew followed the career path that the other disciples did. His degree of trust was symbolized by leaving his money box behind.[4] He left the certainty of money for the uncertainty of a new life's work. A person's occupation has a quantifiable marker: money. His calling rarely does.

Jesus warned against trusting in money. Riches are deceptive, He taught. To trust in riches requires that you serve riches. This is the great paradox of riches. That which seems to liberate men from worldly cares in fact ensnares them. They subordinate themselves to the procedures that produce wealth. Riches are time-bound. They are addictive. They betray a person's trust. Riches are mammon: the desire to accumulate marketable assets.[5]

As part of Jesus' call to trust Him, He healed people. He fed crowds. This led to multitudes following Him in a quest for political deliverance from Rome. They trusted in politics rather than His words. He rejected such followers. His miracles were designed to reinforce people's trust in His message.[6]

Jesus empowered His disciples to perform miracles of healing. Then He sent them to bring the message of repentance. He told them not to take along food, money, or weapons. They were to trust God, their ability to perform miracles, and the generosity of local disciples to house them and feed them. They were to trust in supernatural capital. This was a recapitulation of the miracle of manna in the wilderness, which had been temporary. Once they had strengthened their faith, based on this exercise of trust, Jesus told them to carry a sword.[7]

The story of Herod and his dancing stepdaughter was a story of misplaced trust. A present-oriented king made a commitment to a present-oriented young woman. Her vindictive mother told her to ask for the head of John the Baptist. She trusted her mother. All three exercised poor judgment.[8]

Jesus fed tens of thousands of people with only a few loaves of bread and fishes. This mass feeding required each family to partici-

3. *Ibid.*, ch. 35.
4. Chapter 3.
5. Chapter 5.
6. Chapter 2.
7. Chapter 7.
8. Chapter 8.

pate in performing the miracle. This required the division of labor. Some trusted His message because they had experienced the miracle.[9]

Jesus told the Pharisees that they stole from their parents when they gave money to the temple in God's name. They undermined the trust that parents placed in their children for their support in their old age.[10]

The great issue of trust is seen in Christ's warning that men cannot serve two masters: God and mammon. They must choose. This is a matter of trust: trust for the things in this world and the world beyond the grave. Mammon promises more in this world. It ignores the afterlife. Jesus taught that God is trustworthy for supplying the good things of both worlds.[11]

The rich young ruler sought eternal life. Jesus told him to sell his goods and give to the poor. Then he could follow Jesus. The man went away troubled. This was the choice: God or mammon. He found it difficult to choose to follow Christ. He placed his trust in wealth, for he possessed wealth. He placed faith in himself and his own works.[12]

Jesus told the apostles that they would receive a hundredfold inheritance. They were to serve as trustees of His kingdom. Their inheritance would be representative: inheritance through those who would be adopted into the kingdom.[13]

Mark's Gospel recorded the incident of Jesus and the moneychangers. He drove them out of the grounds surrounding the temple. He did so in the name of God, His Father. He did so as a trustee for God. They were acting as agents of the priests. They had betrayed the people's trust in the priests.[14]

Jesus confronted the religious rulers of Israel with the parable of the rich man who delegated wealth to his subordinates and went away. The subordinates betrayed his trust. They beat the agents of the owner. Then the killed his son. There would be judgment when the owner appeared.[15]

The Pharisees tried to trap him with their question relating to the payment of taxes. He had them bring a coin, which was used for tax payments. It also functioned as currency. He told them to give to

9. Chapter 2.
10. Chapter 10.
11. Chapter 11.
12. Chapter 13.
13. Chapter 14.
14. Chapter 16.
15. Chapter 17.

Caesar what belonged to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God. This was a matter of subordination. So are all forms of trust. Men trust in the continuing supply of benefits. They acknowledge this trust by acts of subordination.[16]

The story of the poor widow who gave all her money to God was the story of total trust. Richer men who gave more trusted God less.[17]

Finally, the story of the two women who anointed Jesus feet with sweet-smelling expensive oil was the story of subordination and trust. They trusted Him rather than money. The second incident led Judas to betray Christ to the religious leaders. The symbolism of such trust was more than he could bear. He trusted money: mammon.[18]

A. Trust and Cooperation

People make plans. To facilitate such plans, they cooperate with others. When Jesus fed the crowds, they had to cooperate with each other in order to gain the benefit of a free meal and the thrill of participating in a miracle. Greater cooperation reduces costs. It increases output through specialization.

Faith is a form of trust. Christian faith is strengthened by exercises in trust that pay off as expected. When Jesus sent the disciples out to the cities of Israel without food, money, or swords, He invited them to strengthen their trust. This was required for future service.

Without trust, the cost of cooperation increases. Less cooperation is demanded. This reduces the division of labor. It reduces output per unit of resource input.

Kingdom-building requires cooperation. It therefore requires trust. God calls on His disciples in every era to build His kingdom in history. He calls on them to cooperate. This requires trust that others will prove trustworthy. Without this trustworthiness, kingdom-building is hampered.

Covenant-keepers' trust in God should lead to their trust in each other. This is what God requires.

Conclusion

People are dependent on God as the source of their benefits. God requires signs of acknowledgment from those who are the recipients of His blessings. They do not earn His blessings. They do acknowledge

16. Chapter 18.
17. Chapter 19.
18. Chapter 20.

them by minimal public sacrifice: rendering to God the things that are God's. This is a token of the total sacrifice that God requires. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1).[19]

This mandates trust. The Gospel of Mark reminds us of the nature of this trust. They must trust either God or mammon. They must subordinate themselves to one or the other.

19. Gary North, *Cooperation and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Romans*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 8.